CHALKSTREAM AND MOORLAND

HAROLD RUSSELL

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CHALKSTREAM AND MOORLAND

THOUGHTS ON TROUT-FISHING

BY

HAROLD RUSSELL

OF THE INNER TEMPLE AND MIDLAND CIRCUIT

Lord, who would live turmoiled in the Court,
And may enjoy such quiet walks as these?

HENRY VI Part II Act iv. Sc. 10

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15, WATERLOO PLACE

1911

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"*Peace be at your Labour, honest Fishermen*"

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PREFACE

It is incumbent upon any one who writes a new book about fishing to open with an apology. He cannot put forward the novelty and freshness of the subject. When so much has already been written, a man hesitates before presenting his work to the public. I am profoundly conscious that a great deal that is said in the following pages about trout-fishing is stale. Yet I believe that fishing is a subject that is not and, indeed, cannot be exhausted. Like travel, hunting, drinking, love, and other simple and primitive human passions, it is of eternal interest. Most books about fishing have been designed to impart instruction. I am too modest about my own skill to suppose that any one, except a mere beginner, can learn much from my teaching. Yet it is gratifying, as the years go on, to find that one improves in the art of throwing a fly and catches fish which used to defy one. That has been my experience, and I trust that others may share it. We cannot all hope to become what are called beautiful fishermen. I myself gave up that ambition many years ago; but every one can attain a certain manual dexterity, and, by exercising his wits as well, will learn how to

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catch trout. It may be that some passages in what I have written about the dry-fly, the sunk-fly, the use of too fine tackle, and the pleasures of filling a creel with heavy trout may invite some of the fraternity to denounce me as a poacher. The border-line between a sportsman and a poacher is hard to define. Big trout in clear streams are so well able to take care of themselves in these days, that the most sportsman-like fly-fisher who wants to catch them must exercise his craftiest powers. I am a firm believer in the efficacy of fishing upstream under almost all conditions, but I will not venture to instruct. It may seem bold to write a book on fishing with the avowed object of amusing rather than teaching. But I myself have derived such great delight from what others have written about fishing, that I cannot help hoping that other fishermen may get a little pleasure from reading my book. Some parts of this volume have already been printed in the *Edinburgh Review*, *National Review*, *Spectator*, *Outlook*, and *County Gentleman*. I am grateful for the leave that has been given me to republish. But in most cases I have altered and added so much that little remains of the original form.

H. R.

London, *April*, 1911.

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CHALKSTREAM AND MOORLAND

Fish, nature, streams, discourse, the line, the hook,
Shall form the motley subject of my book.

I

EVERY thoughtful angler must, I imagine, sometimes ask himself why it is that fishing is so delightful an occupation. Our pleasure begins when we make ready the tackle and lay plans beforehand so that no time may be wasted. Next, there is the actual catching of fish, which rouses excitement of a kind that no person who is not an angler can picture to himself. Lastly, when a good day is over and the basket is laid out for inspection, there is great satisfaction in the feeling that you, as a fisherman, have done well. The pleasures of memory come later, and on these it is but necessary to touch very briefly. Often,

when we are far from the streams that we love most, incidents in a day's fishing come suddenly into our thoughts; and we remember, with the most minute and astonishing fidelity where our fly fell, or how some fish rose. We see in remembrance the exact ripples that broke the surface and some bit of rock or piece of grass that stood by the edge of the water. Why it is that such trivial events of the day should be so indelibly fixed in our memory is not easy to explain. Given a good conscience as to one's past and hope in the prospects of the future, it is probable that nothing adds more to a man's happiness than a mind stored with clear memories of days spent in the open. So the angler always feels that a day spent on fishing has not been quite wasted, though often he may regret having, by bad fishing, wasted precious bits of the day. To discover only when the rise was over what the trout were taking, or to lose a big fish by not testing one's cast or by tying a bad knot, rouses regrets which are as profound but not as lasting as those evoked by the recollection of wasted years in youth.

Yet compared with the serious things of life, fishing is after all a trivial business. The thoughtful angler must frankly confess this. It adds to the difficulty of the problem when he asks himself why the pleasure of catching a few trout is so great and failure so disheartening. The eagerness and excitement with which one sets about fishing water which holds big fish is almost childish. The value of the prize is in no way comparable to the desire it arouses. When the fish are rising and showing themselves, the longing to hook them which one feels is almost insane. And again when we see them feeding regardless of our fly or dashing off terrified at our efforts to delude them, the resentment which the fisherman feels is almost like the anger of a madman. These emotions resemble the longing, the despair, or the indignation of childhood. To tell the truth, fishermen remain always boys so far as their amusement goes. Yet they learn something by experience, and no one will pretend that as we get older the disappointment of losing a big fish, just when it was nearly landed, is quite as bitter as

it was when we were younger. With youthful envy we watch experienced fishermen catching fish when we only bungle and fail. Admiration at their skilful powers and humiliation at our own clumsy casting make us ready to give years of our lives to attain the art which they possess. Perhaps in time we reach the same degree of skill and find ourselves able to catch those shy and cautious trout which seemed formerly so impossible to delude. The satisfaction is very great and well worth the labour and time it has cost to attain. But perhaps, like many things in life, when we have got our desired object we take it as our due ; and the satisfaction is not as lively as the desire might lead us to expect. So success and failure in fishing show us, as in a mirror, the careers of men in the great world. But it is all in miniature, and the emotions of the actors are those of children. It may be, perhaps, because men become again, as it were, little children that fishing gives those who love it such great pleasure and keeps them young.

Most, but not all, anglers are lovers of

nature. Many get a large part of their pleasure from the charm and beauty of the surroundings amidst which it is their good fortune to fish. It is not uncommon, on the other hand, to read bald and stolid accounts of fishing which betray no feeling whatever for the happiness of the open air, and which contain nothing but a chronicle of weights, flies, tackle, sandwiches and flasks. It may be that the baldness of these narratives is more due to a small vocabulary than to want of feeling for the beauties of nature and the charms of rivers and lakes. It is, I think, essential that a good fisherman should be keen to catch fish ; and though he may affect a philosophic air over a blank day, he should at heart feel a great sense of disappointment. If others fishing the same water have caught fish, it is right and proper that disappointment should be tinged with humiliation. Competition of a moderate and unselfish kind gives flavour to the pleasure of angling, but angling competitions for prizes are detestable. A man may enjoy a day's fishing up to a certain point though he has failed to catch anything ; but if

he maintains that he does not care whether he catches fish or not he is a trifler. For the end of fishing is to catch the biggest fish possible and to kill them. To catch fish and throw them back is futile labour and unworthy of a serious angler.

To return, however, to the question that was originally propounded. Can any fisherman explain, to one that is not an angler, the extraordinary pleasure that fishing affords? I doubt it, and no book on fishing, I fear, conveys to those who have not the taste any real impression of the angler's pleasure. To say that *Piscator nascitur non fit* is to offer no explanation and is probably often untrue. Some men become anglers because they have the opportunity in youth, but more have the opportunity and do not avail themselves of it. A man who has the real passion for fishing, so that his mind is constantly occupied with thoughts of it, must be very unfortunately placed if he does not find opportunities. There are, of course, men of very diverse characters who have been fishermen. The notion is deeply rooted that fishing requires

infinite patience and is, as the phrase goes, the contemplative man's recreation.

Often may patience, wisdom's meek-eyed friend,
To every form'd recess his steps attend;
And then propitious to the vot'ry's skill,
Flow soft ye waters, and ye winds be still!

This is a mistaken notion so far as fly-fishing for trout goes, though it may be true when one sits watching a float. In every sort of fly-fishing a man's attentive and observant faculties are stretched to the utmost. For if there is no rise, one waits and watches for the slightest sign of fly appearing or fish feeding, so as to pick up any chance trout that one can. Trout fishing is too absorbing for a man to become impatient.

To tell the truth, there is such variety in fishing and the occupation is so absorbing that one can fish day after day through a season and not weary. Much fishing and many bad days take the keenness off the edge of angling excitement; but it is rare to find a fisherman sated and indifferent. It is a strange thing, too, that of the famous men in history who have been anglers, few, if any, have been bad men. But

this is probably a matter of chance, though men's amusements generally give a clue to the inner recesses of their characters. If we split the pleasures of angling into their simplest component parts, we shall certainly find them placed by different fishermen in different orders. Some would place first the pleasure of being near running water; but this without the association of fishing would be dull. Then there is the exercise of personal or manual skill; this may be enjoyed in various games which do not appeal to many fishermen. Besides skill, knowledge is needed in fishing; and one of the charms of making angling a pursuit is that a good fisherman is always increasing his stock of knowledge and, in most cases, also improving his dexterity. If he does not try to do so, he is unworthy of the fraternity. But what is the good of throwing a long line if we do not hook a fish, and what the good of hooking fish which are not landed? One of the essential pleasures in fishing is that which lies at the bottom of all true sport. Man takes a delight in outwitting wild animals and catching them by his superior cunning. It is

a taste that has come down, much softened but still powerful, from savage ancestors. Fishing combines all that is most attractive in sport, and for solitary men it is almost the only sport in civilized countries that can be enjoyed in solitude. I would, however, repeat that the real thing is the catching of fish. The weight of the bag or basket, especially the size rather than the number of the trout, at the end of the day adds materially to the true fisherman's happiness. There are a few pedants who will be found ready to maintain the contrary. But the power of catching fish is what gives the angler his real pleasure. The more difficult the fishing, the more shy and cunning the trout, the greater the fisherman's pleasure at his skill. It is because big trout are much more difficult to catch than small, that one rejoices so greatly at capturing them.

The literature of angling is more voluminous than that of any other sport, and the pleasures of fishing, which Byron called "a solitary vice," have provided a subject for numberless writers. Byron was not a man to whom the amusement

of angling would be likely to appeal. Wordsworth called it "the blameless sport." The charge of cruelty, which may be brought with more or less truth against all field-sports, is rarely urged against fishing and scarcely ever against fly-fishing. Many humane men, whose feelings revolt against shooting and hunting, still find delight in fishing. Bishops of the Anglican Church, who would think it most unseemly to shoot pheasants or to join in a fox-hunt, see no harm in killing salmon or trout. This may possibly be because fish are cold-blooded creatures and low in the vertebrate ranks. Or perhaps, since the "vice," as Byron pointed out, can be practised in solitude there is less fear of shocking the feelings of others. Fishing is almost the only field-sport that can be indulged in on a Sunday without giving offence; and many an honest angler who never fishes except upon the Lord's Day remembers the rule with which John Dennys ended his "Secrets of Angling": "Pray to God with your hearte to blesse your lawfull exercise." *

Fishing on the Sabbath has not, however,

* J. Dennys, "The Secrets of Angling," London, 1613.

ceased to shock the Puritan feelings of Scotland, and there is a story of a well-known fisherman who sat for a Scottish seat in the House of Commons. His constituents always suspected him of fishing on Sunday and oftened questioned him at political meetings. But they always received this same reply : "By the rules of the club to which I belong Sunday fishing is not allowed." He did not, however, think it necessary to add that on Sunday, when the club-water was closed, he generally secured an invitation to fish elsewhere.

I do not believe, as some fishermen do, that when Sunday fishing is not allowed the trout soon recognize the day of rest. "Soon as ever the church bells begin to ring on Sundays," as a friend of Mr. Sydney Buxton remarked, "the trout begin to rise." "But," he added, "one time I dodged them. It was a Good Friday, but they thought it was Sunday, and when they began to rise I was there."

On streams within reach of London, where most anglers, having fished on the day of rest, return to their work at the beginning of the

week, a belief prevails that were it possible to fish on Monday one would always find the trout rising freely on that day.

The fascinations of fly-fishing, have been felt by distinguished men of the most varied temperaments. I will say nothing about living anglers, and among those who are now dead, I need but mention as examples the names of Nelson, Paley, Davy and Chantrey. Lord Nelson was a fisherman, as every one doubtless knows, though strange to say, Southey in his biography does not allude to the fact. There is an authentic anecdote of a visit which Nelson paid to the Naval Hospital at Yarmouth when he landed in England after the battle of Copenhagen. He came to the bed of a wounded man and was informed that he had lost his right arm. "Well, Jack," said Nelson, "then you and I are spoiled for fishermen. Cheer up, my brave fellow." The sailor's eyes sparkled with delight, and the great man passed on briskly to the next bed.*

Dr. Paley, the famous divine, found his chief

* *Quarterly Review*, vol. xxxviii. p. 521.

amusement through life in fishing. The distinguished author of "A View of the Evidence of Christianity" was very fond of animals, and, in his younger days, devoted to cock-fighting. Though, according to all accounts, a poor angler, the picture in the National Portrait Gallery, which is attributed to Sir William Beechey, depicts him with a rod in his hand. He was, however, wedded to his sport, and when the Bishop of Durham took him to task for delaying the completion of one of his most important works he answered: "My lord, I shall work steadily at it when the fly-fishing season is over."

Sir Humphry Davy, on the other hand, found time to fish in the intervals of his scientific labours, and was, it is said, a skilful fisherman. He is unfortunately, the only one of the four who has left us anything in writing about his sport.*

"The most important principle, perhaps in

* "Salmonia: or days of fly-fishing, in a series of conversations. With some account of the habits of fishes belonging to the genus Salmo." By an Angler. London: John Murray, 1828. The two first editions were anonymous. Sir Walter Scott reviewed the book in the *Quarterly Review* (1828), vol. xxxviii. p. 503.

life," wrote Sir Humphry Davy, "is to have a pursuit: a useful one if possible, and, at all events, an innocent one.

* * * * *

"Though I do not expect like our arch-patriarch Walton, to number ninety years and past, yet I hope as long as I can enjoy, in a vernal day, the warmth and heat of the sunshine, still to haunt the streams."

Of Sir Francis Chantrey's merits as a fisherman I know nothing; but when Malibran, the famous singer, paid him a visit in his studio and cried out with exaggerated enthusiasm, "How happy you must be in the midst of this your beautiful creation!" it is reported that the famous sculptor curtly answered, "I'd rather be a-fishing."

Trout-fishing, which demands the greatest manual skill though not perhaps the greatest knowledge of the ways and habits of fish, stands easily first before every other form of fly-fishing. Indeed, one may be allowed to doubt whether salmon-fishing, however delightful and exciting, deserves to be included under that

name. A salmon "fly" must be so-called from the analogy of a trout fly, not because it bears any resemblance to a fly. The rod and line of a skilful trout fisherman become, as it were, a part of himself and a prolongation of his arm, with which he can place his fly within a few inches of the desired spot. The lure is a copy of the natural food of the trout, and in dry-fly fishing at all events closely imitates an insect, though it may not be an insect classed in the order known to entomologists as *Diptera* or flies. The pleasures to be derived from the exercise of this art, when it has been painfully acquired; the excitement of deluding a shy trout into taking the fly; the delight of slipping the landing net under a big fish, and the joy excited by all the surroundings among which one fishes cannot, I am afraid, be imparted to those who have not felt them. An old keeper truly observed that when we endeavour to form the idea of paradise we always suppose a trout-stream going through it. And I suspect that if they were not afraid of expressing such pagan sentiments most fishermen would confess that they do likewise.

II

I HAVE often thought that an undeserved glamour surrounds the dry-fly fisherman. The art is well worth learning, and though it must of necessity be difficult to attain perfection, it is not hard to acquire tolerable skill with a dry-fly. Many who have never had a trout rod in their hands or seen a trout caught, have heard of "dry-fly fishing." Some, perhaps, have only the vaguest notion what the expression means. There are, on the other hand, many who are skilful anglers but whose flies have only been cast in northern streams and highland lochs. They only know about dry-fly fishing by repute as a wonderful art practised in the South. Some may affect to despise it, and others frankly confess (as Mr. Thackeray did when he wrote about the Whigs) that they are not dry-fly fishermen, but oh! how they would like to belong to that select body.

Whether dry-fly or wet-fly fishing be the more amusing is a matter of taste. In dry-fly fishing, where the angler is bent on capturing a particular trout under peculiarly difficult conditions, the element of sport is present in its noblest form. The man matches his skill against the natural cunning of a timid fish. I should like, in describing the mysteries of the dry-fly, to remove some misconceptions as to the novelty of the method. I shall also attempt to show when a floating fly is efficacious and when, in my humble opinion, it is absurd to restrict oneself to it.

Now, reduced to the simplest terms, dry-fly fishing means presenting a floating fly to the trout as opposed to a wet or a sunk fly. As a rule, though this is not absolutely essential, the dry-fly fisherman will cast up-stream. It is sometimes possible to float a dry-fly down to a trout which is rising below one. The wet-fly fisherman may fish indifferently up-stream, allowing his fly to drift down towards him, or across, letting the fly come round with the stream, or down-stream, pulling his fly back against the current. Moreover, the dry-fly angler generally tries for a specific

fish which is already feeding or which he can see in the clear water of a chalkstream, and judges by its expectant demeanour to be ready to feed. There is, however, no reason, though the purist is alleged to consider such a practice obnoxious, why the dry-fly man should not float his fly over likely bits of the stream on the chance of tempting an unseen trout to take it. And the wet-fly man must be strangely unobservant if he has not discovered that to cast into the rings left by a rising trout often results in hooking a fish. It would seem then, on a little reflection, that the difference between what are frequently believed to be two opposing schools is less than is commonly supposed. Even if we go back to a fundamental distinction, that in one case the fly floats on the surface and that in the other it is sunk under water, it is hard to draw the line between dry and wet. A new fly floats for a time whether it be cast by a professor of the art of dry or wet-fly. So, too, an old fly gets sodden and water-logged and refuses to float. Yet trout may be caught by the one or the other, and who shall say whether

the fly is dry or wet? Perhaps it will be safest for the angler to answer, as the young wife replied to the inspector who asked whether the gas-meter were a *wet* or a *dry* meter: "I think it is rather damp." This does not mean that the much vaunted efficacy of the method is a delusion; but a great deal more depends on the skill of the fisherman in fishing *up-stream* than upon the floating properties of the fly. Success turns quite as much upon selecting particular large feeding fish, and persistently trying for them. This practice chalkstream fishing encourages. Trout in running water, as most persons probably know, invariably lie with their heads to the current. The angler who fishes up-stream has the enormous advantage of approaching from behind and is therefore unseen. His fly, whether it floats or sinks, comes down-stream towards the fish as the natural food does, instead of being jerked against the current as no fly would move. And lastly, when his fly has passed once unnoticed over the trout without scaring it, the fisherman, still unperceived, can pick his line off the water

and try another cast, which is rarely possible in fishing down-stream towards a shy trout.

If a man devotes himself to a rising fish and casts up-stream, keeping out of sight of his trout, I am convinced that (as a general rule) he will do equally well whether he offers the fly floating perfectly dry, or saturated and sinking below the surface. There are, however, occasions when trout are feeding exclusively on floating insects, and others when they are taking sunk food and will not look at a winged or floating fly. Then, as it seems to me, a rational angler will adapt himself to the occasion, still keeping below the trout and throwing up-stream or across. When trout are taking shrimps or larvæ under water it verges on insanity to persist in offering them a dry-fly anointed with paraffin to make it float.

A really skilful Northern wet-fly fisherman, who habitually fishes up-stream, will find very little difficulty in acquiring the art of fishing with a dry-fly as it is practised on the Test and the Itchen. But he will find, if his experience has been gained on the rocky streams of the

North or the peaty burns of Scotland, that he has much to learn about the food, habits, and behaviour of the trout in South of England chalkstreams.

A chalkstream differs from other waters usually inhabited by trout in several respects. The flow of the current is gentle, the surface smooth and glassy, the water of crystal clearness. The even height is maintained by springs and is almost undisturbed by drought or rain. Aquatic weeds flourish in great profusion, and the trout are big, fastidious, cunning, well-fed and in most cases much fished for. The chalk-stream fisherman reckons his bag by the brace; the Northern angler counts fish by the dozen or the pound.

It is under such conditions that the so-called dry-fly has supplanted the older method of fishing the water at random with sunk-flies. But the real discovery, as I have all through endeavoured to point out, was not the use of a floating fly but the enormous advantage obtained by casting up-stream. Colonel Hawker, the famous sportsman of Longparish, used to fish

the Test from the back of a pony. Apparently he fished down-stream with a long line, and there are plenty of dull, rough days when a fair bag may still be got by that method. But for one trout fit to kill, a dozen undersized fish will be caught and many more touched, pricked, and lost. It is for this reason that clubs, and owners of well-preserved bits of chalkstream, make rules directing the use of dry-fly only. In fact, what is objectionable, though they do not say so, is down-stream fishing and not fishing with a wet-fly; and as long as a man directed his efforts when fishing down-stream to one particular killable trout his conduct would not be seriously resented. To fish at random with a sunk-fly down-stream is rather like firing into the middle of a covey of partridges instead of picking your bird.

It is somewhat strange that fishing with a floating fly did not become general in Southern England many years earlier than it did; for no one can be upon the banks of a chalkstream without noticing a hatch of duns, as the sub-imago forms of the *Ephemeridæ* are called. A

great hatch of mayflies is one of the most extraordinary scenes in nature. Even the little olive and iron-blue duns are conspicuous, sitting erect upon the glassy surface of the stream, their wings closed above their backs and their tails cocked in the air. Nor can any observer of the habits of fish fail to notice the movement among the trout when the hatch of fly is on. Every fish takes up his position to suck down the living morsels as they pass over his head. No doubt the vast bulk of the trout's food is found beneath the surface and among the weeds. Floating flies, it has been said, are only caviare ; the sunk food is beef and mutton. But a trout feeding at the surface cannot fail to attract attention, and it is, therefore, not surprising that the first mention of fly-fishing in literature, and, apparently, also the first artificial fly should have been suggested by this spectacle. The passage has been reprinted before, but few fishermen seem to know of it. Claudius Ælianus, who taught rhetoric at Rome in the third century A.D., describes the flies called *Hippurus* (which apparently are not mayflies), and gives an account

of the catching of fish (believed to be trout) that are taken by anglers with a rod and line in the River Astræus in Macedonia. The flies are described as bold and troublesome, in size a hornet, marked like a wasp and buzzing like a bee. It is clear from his description that floating flies led to the invention of the artificial.

"When a fish observes one of these flies floating down towards him on the surface he advances quietly swimming underneath as he fears to disturb the upper water lest his quarry be scared away, draws nearer into its shadow, and then, opening his mouth, sucks down the fly, as a wolf snatches a sheep from the flock or an eagle a goose from the yard, and then sinks under the ripple."

According to the classic author, fishermen cannot handle these flies because of the delicacy of their wings. So they wrap crimson wool round the hook, attach two cock hackles, and with some wax make up the semblance of a fly. Six feet of line is attached to the rod, and the fly is dropped to the fish. They gulp it

down; "and bitter does their feasting turn out." *

Let us pass now from Ancient Macedonia to Hampshire in the nineteenth century. There is a very amusing picture of mid-Victorian angling methods in Kingsley's "Chalk-stream Studies." The description of the chalkstream on a June day is charming; the habits of the fat trout and the natural history of the various insects on which they feed is, with some exceptions, accurately observed. Kingsley was fully imbued with the essential importance of casting up-stream. He constantly dwells on the advantage which an angler on a clear stream thereby obtains. The first thing is to remain out of sight. "The next mistake natural enough to the laziness of fallen man is that of fishing down-stream, and not up." It is when we come to the flies and the method of presenting them to the trout's notice that we find the divergence from modern dry-fly practice.

A brace of noble fish are observed in the swirling clear water beneath a hatch-hole. The

* *De Natura Animalium*, lib. xv.

tyro who is receiving instruction is adjured to "take off that absurd black chimney-pot" and crawl up to the fish.

"One of them you may be sure of if you will go the proper way to work and fish scientifically with the brace of flies I have put on for you—a governor and a black alder. In the first place you must throw up into the little pool, not down." The fish will take fright soon enough if you do not do so. The advice about stooping and crawling is frequently repeated. Kingsley knew well how tiresome and ignominious the beginner finds it. "If you wish to catch large trout on a bright day, I should advise you to employ the only method yet discovered." The next advice is to fish with a short line; you cannot fish with too short a line up-stream.

"Make your fly strike the brickwork and drop in." "Then don't work or draw it, or your deceit is discovered instantly." "There! you have him. Don't rise! Fight him kneeling; hold him hard, give him no line, but shorten up anyhow. Tear and haul him down

to you before he can make to home, while the keeper runs round with the net. . . . There, he is on shore. Two pounds, good weight." It is plain from this description that the hooks must have been large and the gut stout. Indeed, Kingsley speaks of "our large chalk-stream flies," and asks "why are the flies with which we have been fishing this morning so large—of the size which is usually employed on a Scotch lake?" On the North Country clear streams anglers were already using the smallest gnats, but he argues that "a large fish does not care to move except for a good mouthful," and propounds the theory, "the bigger the bait, the bigger the fish." He admits, however, that on some chalk-streams "midges" were needed, and that on the Itchen at Winchester hardly any flies but small ones were used after the green-drake was off. But the Winchester fishers confessed that they lost three good fish out of four on their very small flies.

The artificial flies to which Kingsley pinned his faith were four in number, but all copies

of live insects—the *Caperer*, or caddis fly; the *March-brown;* the *Governor;* the black *Alder.* He also refers to various large palmers or hairy caterpillars. Nowadays over nine-tenths of the chalkstream trout fall victims to flies which are more or less perfect copies of the little duns or sub-imagos of the *Ephemeridæ*, which float over them as naturally as the real insect does. The *Governor*, *Alder* and *Palmer* are not insects which are found upon the water unless they have been blown by the wind or fallen from the bank. It is remarkable that an observant man like Kingsley should not have discovered that the vast bulk of the floating insects at which chalkstream trout rise are duns. Yet he pronounces the duns to be "uncertain flies," and asks, "did you ever see any large fish rise at these *Ephemeræ?* And even if you did, can you imitate the natural fly?"

The mayfly or green-drake does not come on until five o'clock, and in the meantime the anglers rest and comfort themselves with sherry, biscuits, and cigars. So far there has been no mention of the dry-fly or of fishing for rising

fish. But when the trout are glutting themselves with mayflies he advises throwing wherever you see a fish rise. "Do not work your flies in the least, but let them float down over the fish or sink if they will; he is more likely to take them under water than on the top." So much, then, for the dry-fly in the mid-Victorian era: Kingsley, at all events, had not discovered its efficacy.

Anglers seem to have practised fly-fishing for trout for some two hundred years before discovering the advantage of casting up-stream. Charles Cotton published his "Instructions how to Angle for a Trout or Grayling in a clear Stream," in 1676; and though there is little to be learnt from it, the curious fly-fisherman will be rewarded by a careful study of this immortal classic. It formed Part II. of the fifth edition of "The Compleat Angler," the last that was published in Izaak Walton's lifetime. Cotton, of course, was writing of down-stream fishing when he recommended a very long line as a mighty advantage. "*To fish fine and far off is the first and principal rule for trout angling.*" This

often-quoted phrase contains good advice for those who search the water with a sunk-fly fished down-stream ; but for the dry-fly fisherman and all who have acquired the art of throwing up-stream, the best advice would be *fine and close behind your fish.* It is surprising how near one can approach a trout from behind and with what boldness one may cast over him by keeping out of the limited range of his vision.

In the middle of the nineteenth century Stewart was one of the pioneers of up-stream fishing. In his "Practical Angler," a book which has never received the praise it deserves, he argued at great length on the advantages of fishing up-stream where the pace of the current admits.* Stewart, who was a Northerner, does not mention the dry-fly.

There is no doubt, however, that fishing with a floating fly up-stream is very much older than is commonly supposed. Some evidence exists for believing that it first came into general use

* W. C. Stewart, "The Practical Angler ; or the Art of Trout Fishing," Edinburgh, 1850. 8vo. A second edition was published in the same year, and was followed by numerous other editions.

on the Itchen, where the water is clearer and the trout are more cautious than on other chalk-streams. Its growth was gradual, and it spread slowly, until it became suddenly recognized as the most effective method of capturing the biggest and shyest of the chalkstream trout. Perhaps the first stage was to cast where a trout had been seen to rise. In "The Angler's Desideratum," by Captain Clarke, which was published in 1839, there will be found instructions for fly-fishing in a calm or in sunshine.

"This mode of fishing is by dropping the fly in the centre of the circle a trout describes on sucking down a fly . . . Keep a sharp look-out for a circle to enable you to drop your fly with quickness and precision in the centre. . . . The largest trout are taken this way." *

Here we have the rudiments of what is now called "fishing the rise" as opposed to fishing

* "The Angler's Desideratum, containing the best and fullest directions for dressing the artificial fly ever offered to the public ; with some new and valuable inventions by the author, from a practice of nearly half a century." [Edinburgh], 1839. 12mo. I have never seen a copy of this book, and am compelled to quote at second hand.

the water at random. The next stage, perhaps, was the practice of throwing up-stream, which has such obvious advantages with shy trout, that it seems incredible that it should not have been general long before Stewart enlarged upon its merits. When fishermen had come to casting up-stream and to directing their efforts to rising fish, it was but a step to let the flies float down over the trout. There, then, is the fully developed dry-fly system.

Some little while since an article in *The Field* on the origin of the dry-fly evoked some interesting letters from old Wykehamists, who remembered the Itchen half a century ago. We have the evidence of one, whose memory went back to the years 1844 to 1848, that the systematic use of the dry-fly, as we know it, was unknown at that time on the Winchester College water. The boys had only a short time for fishing, but they used to look for a rise and made a point of putting their fly, while it was still dry, over the trout. After a few casts it got soaked, and they went on fishing in the usual way. On changing flies they gave the new fly a similar

chance by floating it over a rise. Occasionally a man would change flies merely to get a dry one.* The extraordinary thing is that, having got so far, no one discovered that by whisking the fly briskly through the air it was possible to keep it dry and make it float.

About this time (1851) there appeared the "Vade Mecum of Fly-fishing for Trout." The author was George Pulman, and he gives the most precise instructions for the use of a dry-fly. He points out that when trout lie near the surface waiting for floating flies, a wet one sinks beneath their line of vision because they happen to be looking upwards. "Let a *dry* fly be substituted for the wet one, the line switched a few times through the air to throw off its superabundant moisture, a judicious cast made just above the rising fish, and the fly allowed to float towards and over them, and the chances are ten to one that it will be seized as readily as a living insect. This dry-fly, we must remark, should be an imitation of the natural fly on which the fish are feeding, because if widely different,

* *The Field*, March 3, March 24, April 7, 1907.

the fish instead of being allured, would be most likely *surprised* and *startled* at the novelty presented, and would suspend feeding until the appearance of their favourite and familiar prey." *

We come back to the Itchen in the 'sixties, by which time, if we are to believe old Wykehamists, no one thought of employing any other method than dry-fly. Flies were got from Hammond in those days, and they were tied to float with upright wings. Mr. Francis, the well-known author of "A Book on Angling," writing a little after this, recommends Ogden's floating mayflies, and a floating fly sold by Hammond of Winchester. † In the first edition of his work, published in 1867, he recommends, when a fish has risen and missed, that the angler should give him a rest. "If he again comes

* George P. R. Pulman, "Vade Mecum of Fly-fishing for Trout; being a complete practical treatise on that branch of the Art of Angling." London, Longmans, 1851. 8vo. This was the third and enlarged edition of a book first published in 1841.

† Francis Francis, "A Book on Angling," being a complete treatise on the art of angling in every branch, with explanatory plates, etc. London, Longmans, 1867.

short, give him another rest and try a dry fly over him. . . . Taking then two or three turns of the fly in the air instead of one, so as to dry the tackle, let him deliver the fly straightly and well, a yard above the fish, and merely raising his rod as the line comes home, allow the fly, sustained by the dry hackle and wing and by the dry gut, to float down on the surface like the natural fly, without motion." Mr. Francis had discovered that "it is quite wonderful at times what can be done under apparently adverse circumstances with a dry-fly." At the same time he was far removed from the stern modern purist who would rather catch nothing than use a sunk-fly. For my own part, I become more and more inclined to approve of the sentiments which Mr. Francis gives vent to in the following passage :—"The judicious and perfect application of dry, wet, and mid-water fly-fishing stamps the finished fly-fisher with the hall-mark of efficiency. Generally anglers pin their faith to the entire practice of either one or the other plan, and argue dry *versus* wet, just as they do up-stream *versus* down, when all are right at times, and

per contra all wrong at times. It requires the reasoning faculties to be used to know these times and their application."

Since many anglers believe that the dry-fly is quite a modern discovery, it is worth noting that the passages I have quoted were written more than half a century ago.

III

It is difficult apparently, even for a philosopher, to engage in controversy without exaggerating the merits of the system he supports and attributing imaginary faults to the school he opposes. For this reason, the battle, if one may use so strong a word, about the advantages of dry-fly and wet-fly fishing, still continues fitfully.

It may, I think, be safely assumed that every angler who is skilled enough, who places size of fish killed above numbers, and who is fishing in water not too rough and rapid, will throw up-stream. The respective merits of wet and dry-fly in such a case will depend a great deal upon the weather and upon what the trout are doing.

The first concern of every fisherman is the weather. The first matter that occupies his attention by the riverside is the force and

direction of the wind. The next question that he asks himself is: "What are the fish doing?" Now trout on an ordinary chalkstream may lie like stones at the bottom, or if they are stirring, they may be doing a variety of things. They may be "rising," "bulging," "tailing," "smutting," or "minnowing." When they are "rising," which means taking from the surface of the water floating insects, for the most part *Ephemeridæ*, the dry-fly angler has his chance. On a normal summer day, upon a chalkstream, a hatch of duns usually appears. It rarely begins before ten. It seldoms lasts after three, and there is a pause before the distinct evening rise. It is generally at its best between twelve and two. Sometimes no fly appears until the disc of the setting sun touches the horizon. It may be a very short opportunity, but some anglers are content to remain idle and observant until the moment arrives. Trout are said to be "bulging" when they are taking the larvæ or hatching insects under water as they cast off the shucks or envelopes and rise to the surface. Then the wet-fly fisherman, using a small hackled fly, has his

chance, casting of course up-stream to the feeding fish, and if successful he may be proud of the performance.* It is really far harder to hook a trout under these conditions than when one sees the floating fly taken and knows the moment when the hook must be driven home by tightening the line. When trout are "tailing," they break the surface with their caudal fins as they grub with their noses for shrimps, snails, and similar food. Here again the skilful fisher with a sunk-fly may be congratulated if he can catch them. The beginner, thinking that the water is broken by the trout's nose, is often deluded into wasting his time and offers a floating fly to the "tailing" fish at the wrong end of its body. "Smutting" fish are taking little black, almost invisible, dipterous insects from the surface, and the pure dry-fly again offers the best chance of success. Trout chasing minnows often make a great commotion on the gravelly shallows. Sometimes they will come open-mouthed like

* Since this was written Mr. Skues, in his "Minor Tactics of the Chalkstream," has given us an admirable treatise on the successful use of the sunk-fly on chalkstreams.

sharks at any big sunken fly dragged across their line of vision, and when caught they freely vomit the undigested minnows. But is this fly-fishing? I very much doubt whether the trout does not take the lure for a minnow.

In dry-fly fishing there can be no doubt that the trout takes our artificial fly for one of the natural insects on which we can see him feeding. It does not follow that, in order to be successful, we need always offer the same species as he then happens to be rising at. A change may be welcome, and a fish which has been taking duns will occasionally rise voraciously at some chance or fancy fly. But when, as sometimes happens, a feeding fish fails after repeated offers to rise at our fly and goes on feeding, it is obvious that we must move to another fish or try and discover what he desires and suit his taste. In wet-fly fishing down-stream we are very much in the dark, for we neither see the trout nor what they are feeding on. We discover by experience, gained by ourselves or imparted by other fishermen, what pattern of artificial fly best suits the fish. It may well

be that our large sunk "flies" are taken for small newts, frogs or fish, crustaceans, snails or the larvæ of water insects.

The small flies dressed on eyed-hooks which are used by modern dry-fly anglers are the most perfect imitations of the natural insects that can be seen. The tendency among dry-fly fishermen has always been to imitate as closely as possible the fly on the water which they see the fish taking. This minute exactness has now reached such a point that we can get copies of the two sexes of the same species of insect. I have not yet seen convincing evidence that the trout ever show a marked preference for one sex as compared with the other. There is among dry-fly fishermen an extreme school, who are believers in what is called the exact shade theory. The *Ephemeridæ* vary somewhat in colour when they emerge from the nymph state; the same insects apparently assume a lighter or a darker shade. There are days when we have a hatch of dark olive duns, and days when light olive duns appear. Those who support the theory above referred to believe

that the greatest success among the trout will be secured by him who can most exactly match the shade of the fly on the water. With this object they are said to carry magnifying glasses for examining the natural insect, and a paint-box to colour the artificial fly.

At the other extreme are those who believe that fish are absolutely colour-blind. Sir Herbert Maxwell, who doubted the capacity of fish to distinguish difference in the colour of objects presented to their view, tried the effect of scarlet and blue mayflies on the Gade and the Beane in Hertfordshire.* With these he caught trout, and no doubt, as he said, could have caught more. But the experiment is hardly conclusive Two days in the mayfly season are not enough to establish even partial colour-blindness ; and Mr. Buxton, who happened to fish one of the same bits of water on the following day, declares that the fish were for the time being simply silly, and had lost all discrimination. There are many reasons for thinking that size and shape in a floating fly which passes over the

* See *The Field*, June 19, 1897.

trout's head, between its eyes and the light, must be more important than colour. Whether fish are colour-blind has, as I shall show in a later chapter, not yet been satisfactorily determined. Their sight is fairly keen, and with this sense the angler chiefly has to reckon. For these reasons most people cannot help believing that the fisherman will increase his chance of deluding the trout by imitating as nearly as possible the natural insect. We do not know what the natural insect looks like to the trout: all that we can do is to make a copy from our point of view. This does not involve carrying a small butterfly net, a microscope and a paint-box, nor countless patterns of different shades, sizes, and sexes. A little mild pedantry is harmless, but carried to excess, pedantry in angling matters becomes ludicrous.

It is probable that a fly which is to be used floating high and dry on the water must be more skilfully tied if it is to deceive the trout than one which is fished wet and sodden, or dragged sharply before the fish's nose. On clear chalkstreams one often sees a trout come

up and inspect an artificial fly, follow it some yards down-stream, and after a critical examination make up his mind either to open his mouth or to return to his place and wait for something more tempting to pass over. These are the supremely exciting moments of dry-fly fishing, when the angler, crouching behind the sedges, trembles in every limb and feels his heart beat against his ribs as he waits, expectant and ready to strike. Enormous progress has been made in the art of tying trout flies, as may be seen by comparing the plates in Ronald's "Fly-fisher's Entomology" with the beautiful little productions of the modern fly-tyer. *

The number and variety of the patterns with which the modern angler must provide himself is a matter that has led to endless discussions. Izaak Walton mentioned twelve "kinds of artificial flies to angle with upon the top of the water." Charles Cotton began adding to the list, and every subsequent authority did likewise, until by

* The first edition of Ronald's book appeared in 1836 and the tenth in 1901. New plates were prepared for an edition in 1862.

the middle of last century the unfortunate angler did not think his outfit complete unless he had about a hundred different patterns. "Ephemera," in 1847, described ninety-two varieties of artificial flies as essential.* This was, of course, in the days when three, four, or even more flies were used on the same cast. It is rather interesting to compare the lists of flies which the most modern writers on trout fishing have compiled. Mr. Halford, though he gives a hundred patterns, does not apparently pretend that any one need squander a fortune in laying in such a stock. Many great anglers would not consider more than a dozen essential. Mr. Dewar thinks eleven, including mayfly and spent-gnat, enough. Lord Granby gives a list of twelve flies, excluding the mayfly. Sir Edward Grey puts his faith in four patterns for ordinary days on a chalkstream, namely, the olive quill, the iron blue, the red quill, and the black spider. To these he would

* "Ephemera" (*i.e.* Edward Fitzgibbon). "A Handbook of Angling: teaching fly-fishing, trolling, bottom-fishing and salmon fishing; with the natural history of river fish and the best modes of catching them." London, Longmans, 1847.

add the mayfly and the sedge-fly in their season, and for Northern wet-fly fishing only three standard patterns. Mr. Buxton adds a few more to these, including, for Hertfordshire streams, the alder. But he truly says that, in the experience of most dry-fly fishermen, the necessary variations are small, that day after day but one pattern has been used, and that during the whole season not more than half a dozen different flies have been tried.

I am firmly convinced that dexterity in casting is of vastly greater importance than, within reasonable limits, the exact pattern of artificial fly. The greatest success will attend the man who can with certainty throw the lightest and most accurate fly, and not him who has the greatest number of patterns to select from. To this platitude it is tempting to add a few more maxims for dry-fly fishermen.

First, keep yourself and your rod out of sight, which is not very difficult if you approach your trout from behind, and do not think it undignified to stoop and take covert behind the sedges. Secondly, never be in a hurry, and do not cast

too often. It is much better to wait an opportunity when the trout is likely to take your fly, than to make repeated casts when his attention is distracted by the natural flies. Thirdly, fish with as short a line as you find convenient, and never use finer gut casts than are absolutely necessary. Sometimes one can stalk a fish so successfully that it becomes difficult to cast so short a line accurately. It is much better to scare a few fish than to use such fine gut that you get broken as soon as your fly is taken. Fourthly, do not go on fishing with a sodden old fly, nor with a pattern which is evidently unattractive to the trout, and do not refrain from testing your cast with a good pull, for fear lest you should discover it to be rotten. Fifthly, when you have made a bad cast, let the fly float well past and below the trout before you pick your line off the water and try again. Lastly, it is a great thing not to waste time over small trout because they happen to be rising in an easy place. The first thing to determine before trying for a fish is whether he is worth catching. At the end of the day a brace of good big trout killed will give a feeling

of much greater satisfaction than any number of small ones caught and put back into the river. Of course, in a rapid and coloured river it is impossible to select a fish ; but in clear streams there is no more valuable power than that of seeing trout in the water and also distinguishing the rise of a big fish from that of a small one.

It is probable that Will Wimble, "who makes a mayfly to a miracle and furnishes the whole country with angle-rods," would be vastly astonished with the modern products of the fishing-tackle industry. It is satisfactory to know that in this we have nothing to fear from foreign competition. I cannot refrain from transcribing from a recent book a passage on this point. "It is a pleasure to draw the attention of my readers to the fact that, with one exception, the articles I mention are English made, and to think that in my favourite sport we are almost entirely independent of foreign manufactured goods." This is, indeed, good news for anglers ; and the pleasures of fishing will be enormously increased for Tariff Reformers who are also fishermen.

The outfit of the modern angler varies but

little according to his taste. Nothing can equal a good split-cane rod, but it should not be too heavy. A stiff rod not longer than about ten feet is needed for dry-fly fishing. Indeed, it can hardly be too stiff. The same rod will do well for wet-fly fishing, but many a rod which is excellent for loch-fishing is not stiff enough to pick a long line off the water and dry the fly. The line should be greased to make it float, and may well be heavier than the ordinary trout line. It is a good plan to keep two reels and two lines in use: one for ordinary work and a special greased and tapered line for dry-fly. The gut cast should also be tapered, and as stout at the point as the trout will stand. There are difficulties enough without adding to them by using a finer cast than is necessary. The little paraffin bottle tied to the button-hole has now become the badge of the dry-fly fraternity. To the dry-fly purist a trout killed upon a paraffined fly dies in all the odour of sanctity. The use of paraffin to make flies float was heralded as one of the greatest discoveries of the age. I used to carry a bottle, and gradually

became convinced that it was very troublesome and of such small advantage that I joyfully gave it up. Sir Edward Grey, I have always been pleased to think, sets his face against the paraffin bottle. His innate conservatism has prevented him, so he tells us, from ever taking to it. He does not think trout mind the oil, but he does not believe that he would land more trout by using it. "Well-made dry-flies used to float very well before paraffin was adopted; they do so still; and I resent the intrusion of the odious little bottle and oil amongst my fishing tackle." On the other hand any grease which makes the line float is a real blessing. When the line floats, as it should, one has the advantage of picking it off the water without wetting the fly. There is a belief, fostered no doubt by the vendors of this preparation in expensive pots, that nothing is more effective than fat from the kidneys of red-deer. Mutton-fat is just as good, and nothing is more convenient than a tube of lanoline, used in nurseries as an emollient for the chapped faces of infants.

There have always been anglers who delight

in carrying about new tackle and useless paraphernalia of endless variety. To these some of the articles recommended in a modern fishing book may be welcome: field-glasses to discover what fly the trout is feeding on; "the fly fisherman's fly-catching net," costing 30*s*., and folding up to go in the creel, used for securing, examining, and matching the fly on the water; a portable electric light for evening fishing, "can be suspended round the neck, lies flat on the breast, and, when turned on by means of a switch, sheds a bright and constant beam of light full on the hands, etc."; a watchmaker's eye-glass for scrutinizing the gut and deciding whether it is sound; a file for sharpening hooks! There will always be anglers who like to carry the special patented "fisherman's knife," with forty-two different tools, and others who unpick knots with their nails, disengage the fly with their finger and thumb, bite off ends of gut with their teeth, and kill a fish by tapping its head against the toe of their boot. It is, after all, a matter of taste, as to which each one must please himself. It is quite certain that the man

with most tackle does not always catch most fish. Neither does the man who can throw the longest and straightest line, whose action is graceful and pleasing, always prove most successful. Some men are fine fishermen and others are fish-catchers. The truth is that angling is both an art and a science; skill and knowledge both help, and the fisherman may possess them in various proportions. The fish-catcher uses his experience and has an instinctive insight into the trout's mind which enables him to delude the fish.

IV

It is hard to believe that there can be a greater pleasure than to find oneself on a May morning in the sweet water-meadows through which a gentle chalkstream flows; to feel that the whole day is yet before one; to kneel, unperceived, behind a rising trout—

> *And lightly on the dimpling eddy fling*
> *The hypocritic fly's unruffled wing.*

Every fisherman who spends much time upon the banks of streams and rivers knows that each has a character of its own. This notion is reflected in the pagan idea that every river has its spirit or deity watching and guiding its course from the spring to the mouth. The angler is tempted to attribute personality to the Itchen or the Test, the Tay or the Tweed, and as he watches the various changes that come over

it from one hour to another to imbue each river with character as though it were a live thing. This pagan feeling, which once led to the worship of the gods and goddesses of rivers, still produces a feeling of fondness for individual streams which only anglers and people of that sort can appreciate. Those that are passionately fond of fishing will remember how their fondness for different rivers has varied with their humour. At one time they will long to be by a placid chalkstream with wet meadows full of marsh-marigolds; later they want the scent of heather and the gurgle of brisker water tainted with peat and forming brown pools among rocks. Our tastes vary with the season of the year and much depends on where a man has fished happily in earlier years. It may be that to one the clear Derbyshire Dove is the ideal; or that to another it seems that the most real happiness can be found by those smaller foaming streams that descend from Exmoor. Though tastes vary among fishermen, there is a season for everything; and so it happens that one may, at times, almost gratify the desire for fishing with nothing better

than an artificial moat, pond, or canal and a stock of American rainbow trout.

Taking the trout streams of Great Britain from end to end, the most delightful sport, the most interesting fishing, and the greatest variety of happiness can probably be got on the Hampshire chalkstreams. Of these I think the queen of rivers is the Test. It is with the Test, at any rate, that I shall begin; first with that upper part which is above the town of Whitchurch, where the great road from London to Exeter is crossed by another which runs north and south from Newbury to Winchester. The valley of the Test is here closed in by cultivated chalk hills and filled by rich green meadows and finely wooded parks. The lovely river is only an infant; but, like other chalkstreams, the Test seems to come from the earth with a good flow, and, a few miles from the springs, is already fair sized without receiving help from any notable tributaries. If it be true that all rivers, as I have said, have their own characters, the first quality of the Test is its clearness. The water of the upper Test is terribly clear. When the angler

first comes to the bank and sees the transparency of the river he is veritably appalled. It seems almost desecration to wade in such limpid water and stir up the bottom. It seems, also, impossible to approach a trout within casting distance and hopeless to succeed in offering a fly to a feeding fish with such semblance of reality as will induce him to make the fatal mistake. Yet it can be done, and, to tell the truth, on this part of the Test, unless the fish are terrified by over-fishing, it is not so very difficult to do. There is to me, still, always something astounding about the rise of a trout to a floating artificial fly when the water is clear enough to see the whole affair. You can hardly believe your senses when, after possibly prolonged failure and scaring many fish, you find the hook fastened and the line tight. I well remember the first trout that I killed on the Test. There are some enthusiasts who pretend that it is better to fish the Test and catch nothing than to make up a good basket on less noble streams. I cannot wholly agree with this view; for happiness and disappointment are intimately connected with success and failure in

fishing. If fish are rising, failure to catch them can only be attributed to ignominious want of skill. But when there is no hatch of fly, and the trout are concealed in the weeds or lying like logs at the bottom, the philosophic fisherman can always find plenty of enjoyment on the Test.

The day I have in mind was about the middle of June, when the valley of the Test had reached the perfection of beauty. The flowers in the meadows had not yet gone to seed, and the yellow flags in the ditches, and the white buck-bean in the marshy places, were still in full luxuriance. The air was alive with skylarks. A snipe flew round, rising, and falling, and bleating. The little sedge-warblers were vociferous, and I particularly remember the harsh monotonous chirp of the reed-bunting, which always calls up in my memory thoughts of chalk-streams. I need only mention, besides, the cuckoos' and the turtle-doves' notes, and the whirring noise which the swifts made with their wings as they dashed and wheeled about over the water. The sun shone, but there was a

light easterly wind and the whole morning slipped by without result. The river was, as I have said, appallingly clear; but I knew what to expect and was less dismayed by this than by the absence of flies on the water. The fish were not feeding, and though I cast over a number of scattered rises no trout was to be tempted a second time. The Test at this point is so thickly fringed with reeds, sedges, and marsh-soil that one must wade into the river. Wading has some advantages and some discomforts. You disturb the water, but you can approach a trout from the rear with surprising success. Your heavy, wet waders are a burden, but you can cast up-stream without fearing the drag of the line on the little floating fly, which in a swift, limpid stream like the Test is absolutely fatal to fishing. Standing in mid-stream, with the cool water running up to his knees, the angler can see every stone at the bottom, every detail of the green waving weeds, and every fly or other particle of food that comes down floating on the surface. He scans the pure stream above him and watches the runs between the green and

white islands of water-buttercup on which wagtails love to disport themselves. He does not neglect the smoother, slower stream at the edge, where coarse sedges on the bank overhang the margin of the river. Then there appears the ring of a rising trout, or better still a clear view of a black nose poked up to suck down the short-lived dun. There is no mayfly on the upper Test, but there are few days when there is not a hatch of some species of the smaller *Ephemeridæ*, which the trout take with steadier but less reckless greed. It was past two o'clock when the hatch of fly and the rise of fish began after a fruitless morning. Clouds gathered over the sun about noon, the wind dropped, and a heavy shower descended whilst I sat in the thatched and wattled fishing-hut expectantly watching the heavens. When the rain ceased everything was quiet and dripping for a time, until the excitement among the *Hirundines* and other small birds showed that the fly was up. The trout soon followed and rose steadily all over the river at the substantial dark olive duns that floated down. It was not long before I had put the landing

net under a brace of trout ; they were not very heavy, but big enough to kill without feeling shame and remorse afterwards. The trout in this upper stretch of the Test are not generally large, and a fish of a little over one pound is considered a fairly good one. They are, on the other hand, numerous and generally in good condition, well shapen and beautifully spotted with distinct round marks of red and black. Prettier fish are seldom seen ; and, since the river in this part has, it is said, never been stocked with new blood, they may be taken as the type of the real wild original Test trout. I caught and killed a third before the rise was over, a very handsome fish of 1 lb. 2 ozs. Those who do not lay out the bag and dwell upon the beauties of the fish they have caught, lose a very great pleasure at the end of the day.

On the Test, there are probably few days from May to September when one should not expect to get a brace of trout during some favourable moment. There is, of course, much waiting and watching. But a swift river is a cheerful thing in itself, and a fisherman ought

not to find the company dull. There are unpleasant times, of course; when east wind makes one impatient and miserable, when cold weather retards the rise of fly, or gusty blasts blow the line round the rod and make it a tiresome labour to keep the artificial fly on the water. But generally the Test is a placid companion, as a dry-fly river ought to be. Pedants have written so much about the dry-fly, as if it were a sacred cult, that those who believe them think that Test trout are not to be caught otherwise. There is, undoubtedly, an advantage on most days in fishing with a fly which floats as well as one can make it. One must, of course, cast accurately and up-stream. Whether the fly be perfectly cocked and dry is a comparatively unimportant detail if only the fish be feeding freely. On days that fish rose steadily at floating duns I have cast a dozen times over a Test trout without putting the fish down. At each cast, as every one knows, the little olive quill becomes more bedraggled and sodden, and one does not spare the time to dry it thoroughly. At the thirteenth cast it sometimes happens that the trout takes

it, as it passes over, water-logged and sinking. Whether that trout was caught with a dry-fly is a question I have never been able to decide. Most fishermen, I expect, would answer that it was: I must confess that I do not care. For my part, I think it was fairly caught, and I know that the water of the Test is so fearfully clear that the trout are well able to take care of themselves.

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The river Test, a mere stripling at Overton or Whitchurch, has grown by the time it reaches Leckford and Stockbridge into a mature chalk-stream. The fair, green, watery valley is broad and flat, and the chalk hills are low and gently rounded. Down the middle flows the main stream, deep, clear, and smooth with many natural attendant arms and by-streams as well as artificial cuts and carriers. The vegetation of the marshy water-meadows has become coarser than it was higher up, and there are broad stretches where reeds and sedges, flags and rough grass are fit for nothing but litter when they have been mowed. But no one can wander at midsummer

through these water-meadows in the Test valley without being struck by the rich luxuriance of this natural growth that extends in places to either side of the valley. There is a charm about it that is indescribable, partly, perhaps, associated with thoughts of fishing. It was midsummer day (June 24) when I was there last, and what is called the pomp of midsummer was at its height. The elder and the dog-rose were flowering in the hedges; the tall grasses and nettles had become dusty by the roadside; but in the water-meadows was a blaze of yellow iris and ragged robin, dwarf orchids and tall white-headed umbellifers. These are the signs of summer at its height. To come down from London by the early train on a stuffy day and find oneself before noon on the banks of the Test between Leckford and Stockbridge is to be transported as it were, into an angler's paradise.

Just as the Test has become by this time a mature and noble chalkstream, so, too, the fish are also grown into noble and mature trout. There had been a long period of drought and baking weather, and the water was clear and

sparkling in the hot sun. But there was a good hatch of duns, and at frequent intervals I marked the rings of rising fish dimpling the smooth surface of the river, which ran serenely between banks richly fringed with water-plants. A narrow pathway had been mowed along the edge, but the judicious scythe of the keeper had left sufficient covert. There is nothing like fishing for chalk-stream trout to make a man learn the art of taking cover. When you have scared fish after fish by your bold appearance near the brink, you learn how little is needed to screen you from the eye of a timid trout. A tuft of thick rushes is enough if you drop upon one knee. I have even relied upon the proverbial broken reed, and found it sufficient to cut me off from the trout's vision. Best of all screens is the giant water-dock. It is an education in a part of the angler's art to try how close you can get behind a rising trout and watch its actions. They say that nothing so effectually teaches recruits the art of taking cover as being under fire and seeing the man next them shot through the head. The soldier's school is more severe than the angler's,

but the lesson is the same ; that is to say, that a very insignificant shelter properly taken advantage of will enable you to put your fly fearlessly and successfully over a trout. It is, indeed, astonishing what one can do when a trout's suspicions are not aroused, and how utterly futile are the best casts when the trout is conscious of your presence. What fish should we not kill if we could only be invisible !

On the midsummer day that I have mentioned, when the trout were rising and the southerly wind blew up-stream, I walked down with the keeper to gather what I could about the haunts of big fish, the times when they rose, and the fly that had lately been most favoured. I am one of those that are driven distracted by a keeper attending me when I fish, so at the bottom of the water I bade him good-day, and he left. My garrulous informant told me much that I stored up in my mind, and in particular showed me a side-stream where big trout congregated. The name of this piece of the water is Cow Drain ; but, in spite of its name and its smallness compared with the main river, it

would have been vastly admired as a trout-stream anywhere except in the Test valley. There was a bridge over the top of Cow Drain with a hatch and below it a deep round pool of crystal-clear water, in which, as in a glass aquarium, one could see several enormous trout. Taking a cautious look over the brick parapet, we watched them against the white chalk bottom heading against the slowly swirling stream, and occasionally jostling each other for places. I must confess that I was sceptical when the keeper told me that he had constantly seen all these big fellows rise boldly at flies, for one or two of them must have been three-pounders. However, I determined to return there and stalk these trout from below where a fine growth of my favourite water-dock would be handy. I could not, from the place where I was standing, see the fish, but the knowledge of their existence made me creep and throw a small red quill, as carefully as I could. The little fly came down cocked and dancing lightly on the swirling surface. I do not think I had tried more than three casts before the fly was taken with a

cheerful smack of the lips. I pulled my trout hurriedly down-stream, and killed him with as little delay as possible, though it seemed an eternity before I could get him safely netted. The fish weighed 2 lb. 4 ozs., so that I felt, whatever happened, this day on the Test would not be a day of failure. There is nothing which gives one such confidence in this sort of fishing as a good fish in the bag.

In the main stream trout were rising off and on all day, and I killed a brace there with a red quill. They weighed a pound and three-quarters and a pound and a half respectively. In the evening I paid another visit to Cow Drain, and there with the same fly, and a repetition of the same manœuvres, got another fish, which weighed 2 lbs. 10 ozs. Thus, with two brace averaging over 2 lbs., I rested well content, though I could not tear myself from the riverside until it was half-past nine, and the mutterings of an approaching storm became loud. The heat of the day had prepared one for this. An awful tempest broke later with flashes of lightning and peals of thunder, followed by a deluge of rain.

Next morning the crystal clearness of the Test was gone and a spectacle unique in my experience presented itself. The river had risen nearly a foot in the night and came down all next day tea-coloured and full of weeds, roots, leaves and other wreckage of the storm. It is rare on a chalkstream to see a spate like this; and though the fishing for the time being was spoilt, the day was interesting and was devoted chiefly to watching the doings of the trout; the weather, too, was fine and the air clean after the storm. The little red quill of yesterday seemed absurd, so I changed to a large red-hackled loch-fly, and oiled it thoroughly so that it floated well. When fish rose, as one occasionally did, there was no difficulty in approaching within a rod's length. Stout gut passed over them unnoticed. It was an odd change from the Test clear to the Test thick. When a fish showed its whereabouts, I hastened to offer my fly. Four fish in the course of the day took it, but two must have been lightly hooked and got away by dint of fierce struggles. Cow Drain produced nothing; and, indeed, the water was

obviously much too muddy there for fish to see a fly.

It was not until past eight in the evening, when the sun had set with a glow and the silvery crescent moon had risen above the chalk hills, that there was any real rise of trout. Suddenly, all over the surface, which shone in the light like polished coppery metal, the noses of fish came up, and the rings and splashes of the rises spread. It was already too far advanced towards dusk to see clearly what the trout were taking. A sedge was the fly that first suggested itself; but it was not for some time, when I had fairly tried it over numbers of fish, that I discovered that they were not rising at the sedge-flies. The red quill was substituted, and it proved once more successful; they took the little fly freely, even when one was but a few feet off casting over the fringe of sedges. It was easy fishing, until the darkness became thicker and one could not see the fly or tell whether the trout rose at it or at something else in the near neighbourhood. But even when fishing has become impossible and one does not want to catch more, there is

something in a chalkstream like the Test which, of a fine summer evening, detains one on the bank until it is dark. The soft flow of the water, the whispering rustle of the reeds, the splash of big trout, the cries of dabchicks or coots, and the cool fragrance of the evening air keep one at the river. At last, thoroughly tired, and sweating under several brace of heavy trout which have to be carried home, you tear yourself away. These happy days end with a ten o'clock dinner in a rustic fishing cottage or old thatched mill-house. Soon follows bed in a low room where small windows beneath the thatch admit the scent from the flowery garden which abuts on the main street of the Hampshire village.

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The real charm of the chalkstream fishing is over in August. Delightful as the early summer months have been, one does not want to spend the autumn in the Hampshire water-meadows. It sometimes strikes one as ungrateful to leave a lovely river when her charms begin to desert her ; but I have only once fished the Test in autumn.

It was the last day of September, and the season had practically come to an end, at least on the lower stretches of the river. Above Whitchurch, there is, however, some water where good trout may still be captured in proper con dition up to October 1. On that date weed-cutting was to begin. I stood on the bank gazing upon the matchless trout-stream, and put up my rod with leisurely deliberation. I had a presentiment that I should do nothing. Could I persuade myself that a blank day on the Test was a greater pleasure than a good day on some inferior river ?

This stretch of water had not been fished for the last three weeks. It was divided into two unequal portions by a mill ; the upper and longer stretch was broad, still-flowing, weedy, and at this season by no means clear. Below the mill-wheel was some rough and tumbling water, and then a couple of hundred yards of swift-flowing stream, running with glassy transparency over a chalk and gravel bottom, with cottage gardens on the one bank and a neglected orchard on the other. The miller recommended the lower water. Here,

among the undulating water-weeds, the forms of the fish with balanced fins stood out very visibly. There was no covert or screen of reeds, and nothing but a flat bank and a clear shallow stream. Was I as visible to them as they were to me? I could have no doubt about the answer, seeing the promptness with which they vanished when I approached the bank. There were some small light-coloured duns upon the water; but, so far, I had not seen a fish rise. I selected a little olive quill from my box and retired to a distance, whence I commanded a view of the water and prepared to wait patiently. The weather was so perfect, the stream so charming, and the exciting anticipation of sport so great, that I almost felt ready to assert that a blank day on the Test was better than a good one on any other river. The night had been rainy, but pleasing autumn sunshine, with pure blue sky and big white clouds, driven forward by a light south wind, followed upon it. The busy humming of the mill, the cries of children playing in the road above, the metallic music of the blacksmith's forge, and the other noises of

the village mingled with the feeble song of robins in the orchard, and the twittering of swallows collecting on the roofs for the autumn flight. I had not waited many minutes before a fish rose in the middle of the stream. I saw his nose break the surface, and marked the place of the spreading circles before the stream carried them away. I made a tolerable cast, and the fly being perfectly dry, floated prettily over him. Twice he must have seen the fly yet did not come at it. The third time he saw only too well, and vanished with the swiftness of an arrow. Some yards above was another fish large and dark, balanced a little below the surface with expectant demeanour and hungry-looking mouth. I judged him by his attitude to be a feeding fish ; and, though he had not risen, thought it worth the trouble of giving him a trial. I whisked the fly until it was dry and cast over him. He did not wait. The flash of the rod in the sunshine was enough ; and the instant the fly alighted on the water the trout was gone into the nearest weed-bed. I then retired from the bank somewhat disconsolate.

The agreeable melancholy of the English autumn had descended on the valley of the Test. Wet nights and heavy gales had begun to turn and to loosen the leaves. Showers of them fell at frequent intervals, and were carried down floating upon the crystal stream. Once from the bridge I saw a trout rise at a dead leaf and then go down again to his expectant position. Water-rats chased each other with unusual boldness across the stream, and their fearless behaviour somehow added to the feeling that the end of the season had come. My next fish rose against the red-brick wall of the cottage garden, which came down to the water's edge. This was the first fish that I saw rise more than once, and he gave me hopes that he had come to the surface for a meal. I tried him, and then waited until he rose again ; then tried him again, casting with all the care that I was capable of. It was in vain, and I began to despair of doing anything, and changed the fly to a smaller size. The little grey *Ephemeridæ* still occasionally floated down, and I could not match them better, nor suppose that the trout were taking anything else. Every now

and then a fish rose in a desultory way, and I hastened each time to try for him. It became rather wearisome, and I thought to rest by walking to the limits of the upper water, above the mill which I have mentioned. Here the hand of autumn on the water was even more visible than below. The great growth of water-weeds had almost dammed the river's flow and reduced the even stream to stagnation. The water was broken by broad weed-beds and a rank vegetation which thrust itself above the surface. Here and there dead and yellow leaves from the elms had been collected into sodden heaps across the stream. It did not seem hopeful; but there were some bits of clear open water, and, if one could but find a rising fish in one of these spots, it would be time enough to think of landing him when he was hooked. A number of moorhens made off with needless despatch, beating the water and raising a disturbance when I came suddenly round a bend. Right at the top limit of the water I found what I sought. A fish rose in an open bit. I approached the sedge-fringed bank and got out a line which seemed sufficient to reach him.

The first cast fell short, but the second dropped in the right spot. He rose at my fly, and that was all, for he was not to be persuaded to come again. The sun was now setting, and the surface of the Test sparkled with the last rays. I hurried down the path which the anglers' feet had worn across the water-meadow. Below the mill a fish or two rose occasionally. I will not dwell upon the increasing anxiety with which I offered my fly to each in turn, nor the successive disappointments. Soon after six it was too dark to see, and the fish also gave up rising. I took my rod to pieces and slipped each one into the partitions of the bag, reflecting that, incomparable as the Test was as a trout stream, a blank day as the last of the season was a sad conclusion.

Next day I visited the water and found weed-cutting going on. The scythe had mown great masses of tangled weed, which floated down, and the plough had raked the gravel bottom. The limpid stream was a thick and muddy river. A few trout were breaking the surface now and again, and seemed to be gasping in protest at the disturbance.

V

One of the great advantages of south-country fishing is that the trout are so much larger than in the north. If only they fought with the strength and liveliness of northern trout what sport a chalkstream would afford. To return from an ordinary Scotch loch or burn with two trout is a disappointment. But it is otherwise in Hampshire or Hertfordshire. This is partly owing to the difficulty of catching them but chiefly to the size of the trout. A brace of fish will retrieve the fortunes of the day, but the opportunity of securing them may be short. You may also make a bungle of your only chances, and it is a bad thing to go home from fishing feeling that you have wasted the occasion which did present itself.

I well remember how I once went to the Gade, in Hertfordshire, not expecting much

success, but certain that I should learn something, as one always does, from a day on a new river. June had been cold, and the mayfly fortnight a failure compared with average seasons. When I got to the water's edge it was about noon, and a bright sun made the sparkling surface of the stream too dazzling to look at. The river Gade ran through an undulating, timbered deer-park, which was a very pleasant place to fish in. Across the bank were long rows of water-cress beds, and in one spot a stretch of wood. The sleepy verdure of July was now at its heaviest; the somnolent purring of turtle-doves were the only sounds which came from the moulting bird world. Upstanding spikes of foxglove rose in the clear spaces of the wood. The hedgerows were profusely powdered with white dust. The tall grasses on the bank were past their prime, shedding their seeds or dry and trodden down. These are all symptoms of the dull months, and I did not imagine that the trout would show any readiness to rise until late evening. Having put up my rod without the usual feverish haste, I began to walk along the

bank to see whether by chance a feeding fish could be marked down.

There was a small waterfall opposite the wood, and just beyond the spot where the gently foaming stream settled down to run more smoothly I saw the distinct forms of several big fish lying close together: they were not feeding fish, but who could tell whether they would refuse food? I chose from my fly-box a large alder and presented it to them. First I cast it dry and let it float over. Then I let it float down wet and sunk. Lastly, I cast across and worked the fly in vigorous jerks a few inches from their noses. They would have none of it: nor did they mind my presence on the bank. The keeper who soon after joined me attributed this unexampled want of shyness to the constant presence of the watercress men, who were always about the spot and never molested the fish. His explanation may have been right. There were a few laggard, late-hatched mayflies about the stream, and I thought it worth while changing my fly to one of these, but it was refused, with the same contemptous indifference.

The keeper left me, saying that I should do no good until evening, by which time there had always hitherto been a number of rising fish to try for. Left, therefore, to my own devices, I spiked my rod in the hard, cracked turf, and lay down to spend the time in waiting. An hour may have passed before I got restless and wandered along the bank until I came to a footbridge with a ford above it. The water was clear, the bottom sandy, and there, above the bridge in the fairway, where the carts crossed, a trout of a pound or so in weight had taken up his position. His demeanour was that of a feeding fish. The expectant air, the agitated tail, the watchful look directed to the surface of the water, were all that could be desired. I retired cautiously from the bridge to the roadway, whence I could cast across, and decided to try him first with the mayfly, which still fluttered at the end of my line. By good fortune it dropped at the first attempt a couple of feet beyond the trout's nose, and floated exactly over him. He paid no apparent attention until it had passed, then, to my intense delight, turned, followed it a little way down stream,

and, after a cautious examination, took it in his mouth. I never saw the whole beautiful business of dry-fly fishing so clearly. With trembling hand I struck; but so hard that I struck off the fly, and thus the first chance of the day was lost. It was very disgusting, but so entirely my own fault and clumsiness, that I bore it very calmly.

Some time elapsed before I had the good fortune to find another trout to try for. Standing upon the bank and looking up-stream at a very smooth-running stretch of water, my attention was engaged by a big fish that came out from under a weed-bed and took up his place alongside as though to make a meal of anything that might float over his head. This being the very thing that was wanted, I lost little time, without moving from the spot, in putting the mayfly over him. He seemed twice to regard it with unconcern. It may be that it escaped his notice, or that he did not recognize it as an imitation of the mayfly. At the third offer he followed it down with languid interest. The fourth cast was completely successful, and

he rose eagerly as it floated over. I was cautious, if I struck at all, not to overdo it this time. The line seemed to tighten of itself, and for one brief moment there was music from the reel. Then the hold of the fly gave way, and I discovered that I had lost my fish. It was very disgusting, but so clearly not my fault that again this time I bore it very calmly. Thus the second chance of the day was lost. Unfortunately a third chance did not present itself. The rest of the afternoon slipped away.

The rays of the sinking sun were now nearly horizontal ; the day had been warm ; the atmosphere was clear ; the sky was a pale green in the west, as it is on the perfect July evening ; and it seemed impossible, when six and then seven and eight o'clock came, that the trout should not begin to rise, as they ought, steadily and at short distances from one another all down the river. No trout stirred the surface with their rings. The warm summer evening passed away, and I waited until it was dusk, thinking that sedge-flies might perhaps come out. But nothing happened, and the river flowed on undisturbed. At last

I packed up my rod, and so came to an end a typical disappointing day. Yet the brace which I hooked and lost would have altered the aspect of the whole day if only I had landed them and carried them home. Sometimes, especially when returning to London after fishing, it seems incumbent on one to bring back something from the country. So one avoids the humiliation of returning with an empty creel by packing it with wild-flowers or water-cress or mushrooms.

I remember an afternoon on the Chess when I wandered homewards with an empty bag. It was getting dusk and beginning to rain. I saw very little prospect of saving a blank day. I was hanging over the bridge, almost too dispirited to try any more, when looking down into the still, clear water of the mill-dam, the zebra stripes of a shoal of big perch caught my eyes. They were swimming round just below me, and when I dropped some gravel, rushed upon it with every indication of hunger. It did not take long to put on a large fly, a *coachman* with substantial body and white wings. I made it sink among the shoal and then worked it up with jerks. Before the

perch discovered that anything was wrong, I had hauled out six fine ones, which made my bag heavy. After that they swam away, and I turned back fruitlessly to the trout.

The evening rise is often the means of redeeming a bad day ; but often, also, hopes that have been built upon it are dashed to the ground. On cold days the evening rise never comes and we wait in vain till dark. On others the placid stream fairly boils and one cannot get a trout to take anything. This is probably one's own fault. There is also the evening rise when one obviously wastes time and hurries from place to place. Now it seems to me that when there is one of the steady evening rises, and every trout is feeding greedily on something, a fisherman who does not secure a brace at least in the hour it lasts is to blame. He may lose his head and get flurried. But if he fishes deliberately and does not kill trout while the light lasts, there must be something wrong with his fly. As the dusk thickens, the difficulty of striking at the proper moment increases. But then one need not be afraid of striking as often as the fish rises. Sooner or later

it will be found that the fly was in the trout's mouth.

When darkness is coming on, the excitement of an evening rise combined with the desire of securing another trout before the day ends, almost always induces hurry. It then not unfrequently chances that we crack off the fly and go on casting without discovering it. So it happens that an angling companion a little way off is getting one fish after another whilst we are in despair at our want of success. It is, indeed, a repetition of what regularly happened in the days of the Georges, when the fish in Virginia Water showed a wonderful preference for the royal hooks. The mystery was explained when it became known that the hooks of all the rest of the courtly party were unbaited. Having myself several times in early days wasted the end of a good evening rise by not discovering that I had lost my fly, I cannot too strongly impress on the beginner that it is absolutely useless to go on fishing when the fly is cracked off. An old writer recommends that when it gets too dark to see, we should at frequent intervals

smartly draw the line through our fingers. Unless the fisherman wears gloves he will immediately make sure of the presence or absence of the fly.

An evening rise such as one sometimes gets on the Itchen is wonderful. There is a long lifeless time before sunset in which to rest and make good resolutions. The wind drops; the green rounded chalk hills below Winchester look clear and sharp in the evening light. The smooth flowing stream shines under the sinking rays. At last the glowing ball dips below the crest of the hills and drops rapidly out of sight. Now is the moment when the evening rise should begin. The first trout starts punctually in mid-stream. Soon another follows close below him. Then comes another and another until the river is fairly pitted with the rings of rising fishes. They rise so frequently and the rises are so bold that there is never a moment when one has not a trout to try for. A vast number of almost invisible little colourless duns are hatching out. The trout rise fast and furious and clouds of flies dance in the failing light. They creep up the grasses and sedges. They settle on one's rod and

one's hands. On the water they are invisible, but they must be floating down in masses. Each trout is poised in his place just below the surface, gulping quietly, steadily and continuously. No artificial fly can quite copy these little watery ephemeral creatures. But some of the modern imitations of the spent flies are extremely good. When trout are taking the spent fly with its wings flat on the water, it is impossible to see what they are rising at. Once or twice on such an occasion I have done well by changing from the small fly to a rather large white *coachman*. You approach your trout from behind and throw as though you meant to give the fish a crack on the head with the fly. If it falls the first time with a little splash near his nose, a trout feeding at dusk will often turn and snap at it savagely. The pleasure of getting hold of a big one in such a manner is very great, the more so as the *coachman* is an old-fashioned fly and rather despised by modern anglers. I suspect that it is taken by the trout for a moth.

When fish are rising well on hot windless days, great sport may sometimes be had with

a dry-fly on deep quiet mill-pools. You throw a fairly long line and let the fly float about at random, gathering in any slack through the rings if the fly drifts near you. When your fly is taken it is a very pretty sight ; and all that you have to do is to tighten the line and deliberately drive the hook in. Trout which rise in such places are cruisers so that one casts more or less at random, and of course the fly often floats long and ultimately sinks without being taken. Unfortunately many small trout rise in such places and get caught ; but by watching one may be able to mark the rise of a big fish and put the fly in his way. A mill-pool is always exciting because one never knows what monsters it may hold and whether they may not rise to an attractive fly.

It happened once that I was able to see for myself and count the trout in a mill-pool ; and but for that I would not have believed that so many big fish could be harboured in one place. It was at Chenies Mill on the Chess one morning late in July. The long, straight, nearly stagnant mill-dam was rather weedy and dotted

over with the large yellow corollas fallen from the *Mimulus* which grew in gay profusion along the two banks. In the mill-pool below, the water that flowed over the boards was reduced to a mere trickle, and the pool was so low and clear that a most extraordinary spectacle met my eyes. Round the side was brick-work and oak boarding, upon which a black stain showed very clearly the usual height of the water. But now, so much had been run off that not more than a foot of water was left upon the clear, gravelly bottom ; and, standing as I was above, upon the side, I could see all the inhabitants of the mill-pool and for some unexplained reason they did not seem to see me. I dropped upon my knees and then sat down so as to keep out of sight. At that time we were favoured by a gleam or two of sunshine, which lighted up the water, and also, apparently blinded the fish. Not counting small ones, there were between forty and fifty trout in sizes ranging from one to, possibly, four pounds. It was a strange sight, and so disturbing to an angler's equanimity, that I hardly knew what to do or how to set about

trying to catch one. Some lay like stones motionless at the bottom; others cruised about among them; others lay against the boards by the side and looked as though they would not refuse a fly. Some were great black brutes, all head and no body; some plump and well shapen and so light in colour, that one scarcely saw them against the stony bottom. My rod lay across my knees, and I hardly dared lift it, lest the flash should discover me to the trout. But something must be done, so I sucked the end of the cast and put on a gold-ribbed hare's-ear which would float. One of the big fish near the opposite side had broken the surface with his nose, which seemed promising. After one or two attempts I managed to drop the fly so that it floated near him, and he turned and examined it curiously; then, opening a great pink mouth, he seized it in his jaws. I tightened the line and forced the little hook home. It was a moment of almost delirious excitement when I sprang to my feet and hurried backwards, dragging him downstream after me, too much surprised to resist. This state of things did not,

however, last long. A struggle began in which the trout fought madly to get under the boards over which the water fell at the top of the pool. He did not seem anything less than a three pounder when he came slowly rolling and splashing to the surface, showing a great white belly and huge fins. To let him reach the boards meant instant disaster, of course ; so I held him tight with a thumb on the reel. But disaster was to come anyhow, and, perhaps, I held him too tightly now that I come to think it over. There was one desperate plunge and a horrible feeling when the cast broke. This dispiriting incident spoiled a great part of the remainder of my day. The mill-pool was, of course, too much disturbed to hope for another fish. When I looked at them the trout were packed together in the middle like a herd of frightened sheep. Some, when they saw me, dashed upwards under the falls ; and others dashed downwards over the shallows, disturbing the water like a flotilla of torpedo boats. I turned my back on the mill-pool and walked up stream, determined to come back when the place had been rested for an hour or two.

When I returned to the mill-pool, a great change had taken place ; for the miller had opened the hatches, and the water was pouring in and filling the pool up to the marks upon the board. Foam and weed were floating round where the water before had been absolutely glassy and clear. A companion who had been fishing below the mill met me. I told him that there were at least forty trout, averaging two pounds each, in the surging waters of the mill-pool and that the best thing we could do was to see whether they would take a large sunk-fly. So fishing by turns and changing from one pattern of salmon fly to another, we fished the mill-pool thoroughly, and in vain.

It seems to me that to have one's fish landed for one by an attendant is to rob oneself of three-fourths of the pleasure in trout fishing. It sometimes appears ungracious to refuse a keeper's assistance, but the satisfaction of having landed a big fish unaided is very great.

It is a strange thing that not one keeper in a hundred can be trusted with a landing-net, except at the risk of inflicting the most fearful emotions on the fisherman. The larger the

trout the more rash and reckless does the angler's attendant become. Instead of dipping the net below the surface and waiting, he makes wild scoops at the fighting fish : to see the fly knocked from its mouth is not uncommon. When the fish is safe upon the bank the angler may well vow that he will never again let another man use the landing-net if he can possibly avoid it. The secret in landing a trout is to remain calm and sink the net. The fishermen should then bring the fish over the net. With a big trout and a small net it is wise to get him in head foremost. Yet we cannot avoid being anxious with a heavy fish on a small hook for sooner or later the hold must give. So we do not wait for the trout to cease struggling and turn on its side, but try to net him as quickly as we can. On the whole I am for netting at the first apparently safe opportunity. There is much to be said on landing and losing fish. A Fellow of the Royal Society has left the following among some maxims which he composed for anglers.*

* Richard Penn, F.R.S., "Maxims and Hints for an Angler, and Miseries of Fishing." London, Murray, 1833. 12mo.

These Maxims are extracted from the commonplace book

"XXXV.—Lastly, when you have got hold of a good fish which is not very tractable, if you are married, gentle reader, think of your wife, who, like the fish, is united to you by very tender ties, which can only end with her death or her going into weeds. If you are single, the loss of the fish, when you thought the prize your own, may remind you of some more serious disappointment."

The reader who is not a fisherman will probably think that there is some exaggeration here. But the pang of losing a really big trout, perhaps the only fish hooked after toiling all day, perhaps the prize of a life-time, is so great that hardly any words can describe it. There is a sensation of despair, when the fly comes back and we perceive that we have lost touch with our fish, that makes us feel as though we could almost burst into tears. It is hard to believe under such circumstances that some mocking demon is not intending to remind us that all is vanity : *omnia vanitas.*

of the Houghton Fishing Club. The author, whose name is appended to the third edition, was a great-grandson of William Penn, of Pennsylvania.

VI

THERE is now, fortunately, a close-time for trout in Scotland from October 15 to March 1. Between those two dates no one may legally catch them. In the South of England the angler's season does not really begin before April, and on chalkstreams it is soon enough to begin fishing in May. In the West-country men open the season much earlier, for the trout are small and recover their condition quickly. But chalk-stream fish are not fit to kill, as a rule, before May. In Hertfordshire the trout rise well in April and sometimes on quite cold days one has good sport. With the mayfly the Hertfordshire season reaches its height. Unfortunately, my days on the famous Lea and celebrated Mimram have always been after the mayfly was over. One had the melancholy satisfaction of seeing monstrously big trout who would not look at a fly.

On southern streams, where there is no hatch

of mayfly, I think the fishing goes on improving through May and June into July, provided that the water has not been too much or unfairly fished. I have had a few days of great enjoyment in August on the Kennet; but the big trout had become lamentably gut-shy. They were, I verily believe, as difficult to delude as any fish that one comes across on private water. By July the haunts and habits of most of the exceptionally big trout have been marked down and noted. Each receives an undue share of attention and becomes shy and cautious in proportion. Very often there are one or two big fish who rise regularly at well-known spots which each angler passes on the way to and from the fishing. These trout are tried for by every one and are fished for every day that any one is fishing. The knowledge and caution that such trout acquire are above the average.

July is generally a bad month on the Hertfordshire trout streams; and on a cold day with a high wind you have July at its worst. A strong down-stream wind makes any weather unpleasant. There is often hardly any hatch of

fly. The trout themselves, which one can see, lie for the most part at the bottom, indifferent alike to the few duns which appear, and to the various artificial imitations which are floated over them. The Hertfordshire trout, as every one knows, are large and numerous; but they do not rise at all freely in July. The water is clear and shallow. There are rough parts which look, to one who is not a dry-fly purist, as though they were worth trying with a wet-fly when one cannot find a rising trout; but a wet-fly fished at random down-stream is seldom productive of big fish.

When Hertfordshire trout do not rise in July the explanation always put forward is that they are glutted with mayflies. But this is doubtful and in the evening there is sometimes a good rise. Hertfordshire is ugly on a grey, cold, cloudy day, such as one gets in July; the sleepy dulness of the foliage is at its height, the grasses have gone to seed, and few sounds of bird-life come from the meadows. Only one bird is still in song, and that, it is needless to add, is the yellow-hammer, which never ceases all day. But the worst thing is a bad wind,

which blows clouds of dust along the roads, and ruffles the water so that one can neither mark where a fish is lying nor follow one's fly as it comes down. Being hopeful and in good spirits, fishermen always persuade themselves, as they sit at breakfast and soak new casts in the slop-basin, that the wind will be up-stream. As a matter of fact, when one gets down into the valley and stands by the water it seems to come from every direction in turn, blowing with blustering gusts which send the line round the rod-top or make the fly fall yards from the spot on which one reckoned it would drop. If added to that, trout are not rising, you have a Hertfordshire trout stream at its worst.

At one time I used to think that one began fishing later in the season than was necessary. The precious Easter holiday which might be devoted to trout was wasted. So an Easter expedition to Exmoor was planned. The great festival of the Church fell that year at the end of March. We took lodgings in a farm-house. It was dark when we reached our farm, wet to the skin after a fifteen mile drive in an open

trap over the moor with torrents of rain all the way. The chimneys of the farm-house smoked profusely. The ceiling of the bedroom was too low to allow one to stand upright and the bed too short to stretch one's full length. The farmer was a drunkard. Next morning opened with an unfortunate accident. I emptied a portable bath out of the window without perceiving that the farmer's daughter was standing below. Fortunately she thought it was an excellent joke.

The day was dry and cold but after a good breakfast one started out in better spirits. The farm-house was close to the water. Let the reader picture the stream. It is a small river which rises in the heart of Exmoor and flows ultimately into the broad waters of the Bristol Channel. The lower portion passes through miles of meadow-land where nearly all the water is overhung with branches and the best pools are obscured by bushes of hazel and alder. The largest fish are to be got here, but the business of fishing is very laborious unless one has been bred to that sort of stream.

On the first day I thought best to begin

where cultivation and meadows end. The red plough and the green grass which cover the hill-sides are replaced by a mixture of heather, dwarf furze, and coarse, yellow grass. On both sides of the valley, along which flows the rushing stream of dark, amber-coloured water, the hills rise to a height of several hundred feet. These sides are marked with well trodden sheep-paths. Against the sky-line one may sometimes see a herd of the wild red-deer which have never been exterminated on Exmoor, or the circling forms of the buzzards which have survived destruction by gamekeepers. At the edge of the moor stands the last farm, white-washed and thatched, and above it the valley may be enjoyed in solitude for three or four miles as you make your way into the middle of the ancient royal forest of Exmoor. Here rough ponies and horned sheep are met with, which first gallop terror-stricken away, and then turn to face and watch the stranger.

My first days fishing that I am about to describe was in the last week of March, and no signs of spring showed themselves on Exmoor. The moorland grass was dry, dead, and yellow.

The brown bracken had been battered down by the winter's rain. The heather seemed lifeless, and was black in patches where it had been burnt. The whole sky was overcast with grey clouds, and a strong biting north-west wind chilled the animal and the vegetable world. The water looked singularly uninviting when I reached the moor and turned from the track on to the heather which grew down almost to the water's edge. Yet there were two consolations for an angler. There was plenty of water, and it was apparently neither too thick nor too clear. I had been told that the Exmoor streams were apt to be either clear and transparent as gin or thick and foaming like bottled porter. The wind, I also observed with satisfaction, was upstream.

When a brisk gale against the current blows,
And all the wat'ry plain in wrinkles flows,
Then let the fisherman his art repeat,
Where bubbling eddies favour the deceit.

The river flowed at this point over a rocky bed which formed in succession ten or a dozen deep pools, with overhanging banks of the most attractive kind. At the head of each pool was

a small waterfall, at the tail a stretch of smooth-flowing, slightly-foaming water. My cast and flies had been made up overnight: a blue upright at the tail, and a hare's-ear as a dropper. I had been told by a west-country fisherman that if with either of these flies trout cannot be caught on Exmoor in the early months of the season it is probable that nothing will be gained by changing to others. I whisked the line through the air, the wind carried out the cast in front of me, and the line rattled between the rings and the rod like the signal halyards against a mast. I wiped my nose, turned up my coat-collar, and began to fish each pool carefully from tail to head. Sometimes I kneeled; sometimes I stood far off and put my flies where the stream took them under the banks or into the eddies; yet a dozen pools were fished over in succession, and almost every yard of water between them, without any sign of a trout.

The next stretch of river was a straight piece of a hundred yards or so running smoothly over a pebble bottom. On either side was a bit of flat grass with rushes but treeless and perfect for getting out a long line. It was the sort of water

where at every cast one felt certain that a rise must follow. But this yielded nothing. The next stretch ran through a wood ; yet with space enough upon the side to fish with comfort. On the steep bank opposite rose a grove of stunted grey, lichen-covered oaks. The lower branches sometimes overhung the water and seemed to make the very sort of places where fish would choose to lie. A few yards behind me, on my bank, was a plantation of larches, showing as yet no sign of green, thickly covered with moss, and extending half way up the hillside. The place was sheltered from the wind, and seemed hopeful. But time after time my flies were cast in vain. At the end of the wood another region began. The stream ran for near a mile beside a stone wall, which rose, often ruinous and moss-covered, upon the opposite bank. Behind the wall the hill ascended steep, rocky, and heather-grown. The water flowed smoothly enough amidst stones and boulders ; in some places too rough to hold trout, in other places almost still, sheltered by stones or winding banks. It was now long past noon, and as one got up the valley the force of

the piercing north-west wind seemed to increase. Half way up the stretch I well remember sitting down behind a hillock to eat some mutton sandwiches. The shelter was so welcome that I sat a good while and smoked with both hands thrust into my pockets. Then I stood up more hopefully, wiped my nose, took up my rod and fished again. When next I looked at my watch it was four o'clock and I had begun at ten. After six hours one may be pardoned if a disheartening feeling arises. I had now reached a stone wall with a barrier of larch poles across the stream, which was reduced to less than a quarter of its former size. Beyond the wall, heather ceased, and a long straight combe went up, covered with coarse, spongy grass-tufts, rushes, sedges, mosses, and similar moorland vegetation. The stream flowed down the middle, twisting and winding between deep and peaty banks. I asked myself whether by fishing on, I should avoid an absolutely blank day. At that moment, as sometimes happens in the afternoon of a dull day, the clouds parted and beams of sunshine fell upon the landscape. The wind was forgotten under this genial

brightness and warmth. This must surely set the trout stirring. I passed the wall and began fishing a narrow stretch of brown water which came out of the tail of a little pool. In the pool itself there was an eddy in which some foam was kept whirling slowly round and round. Something told me that beneath the foam a trout was waiting for food. I put both flies into the frothy spot, the line tightened, and I threw on to the grass behind me a wriggling, gasping, red-spotted trout about two ounces in weight. I tenderly disengaged the blue upright from the corner of his mouth, and tapped him on my boot to end his struggles. There were yet a couple of hours of daylight, and, if the fish would but rise, time enough to catch a dozen like this, which would make a very pleasant breakfast dish. But the sun vanished as suddenly as it came out; and though I fished up for another half mile, until the stream became a mere brook among the rushes, this solitary fingerling was the only produce of the first day on Exmoor. The memory of the day was pleasanter than the day itself, but it was too early in the year to give up hope. Let us pass on hastily from March to the mayfly season.

VII

I AM not one of those who affect to despise mayfly fishing on the ground that it is so easy as to be little removed from poaching. If there is any wind it is harder to cast accurately with a mayfly than with a small fly; and really big trout, as bitter experience teaches, are so well able to take care of themselves that we need not scruple once in a way to take advantage of a bigger hook and stouter cast than usual. I have once or twice seen the trout in the Kennet for a short time lose all sense of caution and abandon themselves to gluttonous indulgence. But the biggest trout are too wise to do this, and, though they rise at the mayflies, they remain circumspect. Nor when they are hooked do they lack ability to free themselves. The mayfly season is often disappointing, but when it is good, it is a season of great opportunities. For this reason, on rivers where the mayfly is bred, its arrival is awaited

with eager expectation by the angler. As a rule it is welcomed with greedy avidity by the trout. On the southern chalkstreams, where the basket is reckoned at the end of the day by brace, the size of the fish killed is or ought to be the first consideration of an angler. The short three weeks, or less, of the mayfly season offer an occasion for killing the big trout, who seldom at other times of the year trouble themselves to look at a fly. I am inclined to think that the same big fish dash at the large red sedge-flies and may be caught when it is nearly dark on hot summer nights. But the opportunity is shorter and less favourable than the mayfly season. When the mayfly is on, three-pounders and four-pounders seem to emerge from unexpected holes under bushes and from the depths of mill-pools to suck down the helpless but substantial insects as they float along with the stream. On that part of the Kennet, where I have seen the finest sport with the mayfly, it appears rather later than on the other southern rivers. The first mayfly of the season is not seen until about the 6th of June. It was past the middle of the month when the day

came that I am about to describe ; but the trout were not yet glutted with the daily feast. I only had one short day before me, and on the evening before I made my usual resolution not to waste a moment in casting over fish that would not be worth killing.

The morning was damp and cloudy, and a strong westerly wind made it impossible in most places to throw a line up-stream. I determined to devote myself to a short stretch of water above a mill, which was not only partly sheltered from the wind, but also was reputed to hold good fish. Above the mill was a long, narrow stretch of water, flowing still and even, like a clear canal. Both sides were bricked or boarded ; and at the bottom grass-like weeds waved with the gentle current, and large trout were poking their noses into the gravel. Above this the river took a turn, and the end of the stretch was marked by a willow with branches trailing in the water, which overhung a deep hole in which many a big trout has broken away. I walked up to the willow and sat on the fence to wait for the hatch of mayfly. The river banks were higher than

the surrounding meadows, and, by standing back, one could cast across the wind and remain unseen by the fish. The water-meadows, cut in many directions by wet channels, extended up to the sides of the Kennet valley. Buttercups and cuckoo-flowers covered the fields, and the damp ditches between them were filled with yellow flags. The clouds began to disperse; sedge-warblers and corn-crakes were noisy on both banks; swallows and swifts hawked expectantly above the water; and only the appearance of the mayflies was wanted to complete the day, and make fish, birds, and man completely happy.

As Ramsbury Church clock struck ten, the first mayfly came sailing jauntily down the middle of the stream, with its fat body floating on the water, and its half-transparent wings cocked over its back. Others followed the first; but these fore-runners of the vast body destined to hatch out on that day were instantly snapped up by the voracious birds. The swallows, I noticed, picked them skilfully off the water; the screaming swifts pursued them as they fluttered helplessly in the air. I kept my eyes upon the

river, but for some time the trout had no chance, or did not discover that the feast had begun. The first rising fish that I noticed was by a wooden hatch on the bank, where a bunch of nettles overhung the water. I put a fly over him very carelessly and he took it eagerly. Unfortunately he proved to be a wretched little fellow of half a pound. I slacked the line in disgust and he quickly freed himself. I saw that there was going to be no difficulty in catching small fish, and repeated my resolution to reserve my efforts for the big. I dried my fly with vigorous whisking in the air, and waited again. A few moments later a mayfly was sucked down in midstream between the willow and the opposite bank. I marked the spot, which looked more promising, and began to get out some line. After two or three failures, I made a good cast. The fly fell airily on the water, and as it descended, assumed the correct attitude ; the line, in spite of the wind, went out straight enough, and floated, well-greased with vaseline and beeswax, on the rippled surface. I waited, with breathless anxiety, and nothing happened.

My fly floated far down, until the line began to drag, and I was just preparing to try again, when a fish rose at the fly; instinctively I raised the rod and, before I knew what had happened, he was hooked. The rod-point bent, and the line cut through the water. In a moment my fish had passed under the willow, and the gut cast came up broken in half. It was disappointing, but the big ones were evidently going to take now.

This commotion had slightly disturbed the water, and I walked down to try a little nearer the mill. Along the bank, between the path and the edge, there was a thick growth of reed, dock, and nettle, which, when one stooped, afforded a very effective screen. Several really big fish were rising at regular intervals close under the bank. I crept up to within a couple of yards, and found that I had not disturbed them. To cast in the usual fashion would be obviously fatal. The best thing to do was to poke the rod over the herbage, drop the fly on to the water, and follow it as it drifted down to my fish. This stratagem was more successful than

I could possibly have hoped. I held the rod steady, and crept along the bank, the fly floating most beautifully in front. There was a sudden gurgling on the other side of the water-plants and a very big trout was firmly hooked. It was a breathless moment: I have no idea what happened except there was an alarming commotion in the water and in a few seconds the fish had broken me, and taken the fly and cast with him. Much disheartened I walked on to Mill-house to repair the loss. But hope soon got the better of despair and I hastened back to the place where I had been in the morning. Then fortune suddenly took a favourable turn. Mayflies fluttered in clouds and floated down in thousands. Big fish went on steadily rising, and I felt sure that in a moment I must have hold of one. I noticed one fish by some reeds on the opposite bank who exhibited the most steady voracity. The river was narrow there, and I easily put the fly across. It fell softly by the bank, a yard above the fish, and floated down to the reeds riding high and dry on the water. It looked so attractively natural that I was quite prepared

when it was taken. I put my finger on the reel, determined at any cost to check the fish if he made for the willow. The gut was strong, and I dragged him boldly down stream, and then held him hard, while he swam sulkily in circles near the bottom. Several times he got into weeds, but each time I managed to drag him out. In two or three minutes he was floating, helpless, sideways on the surface, and I had him safe in the landing-net. A pious ejaculation of gratitude passed my lips. He was well over two pounds ; and I felt a comforting sensation that if I caught nothing more, the day was saved. I turned him out of the landing-net on to the grass, admired his condition and shape, disengaged the saturated fly, washed my hands and sat down to light a cigarette. It is strange how after losing or landing a big fish, a strong desire to smoke always follows.

A new fly, with well-shaped wings of summer-duck feather, fluttered at the end of my cast, and I went back to try whether I could not again deceive one of the big trout in the mill-dam. The artificial fly had now so many competitors

that the chance of hooking fish was much reduced. The hatch continued steadily all through the afternoon. The natural mayflies were coming down in such numbers that not one in a hundred was taken by a fish, and even the birds were sated. It was six before the rise was over. There was a shower of rain, the mayflies disappeared, and except for some little trout jumping in the mill-pool, one could not see a sign of a fish. I had, however, managed to add several other two-pounders to my first, and gave up, well-contented. I like to walk home with my bag heavy and the strap making my shoulder sore.

Thoughts on the mayfly always revive memories of one particularly heart-breaking day of disaster on the Kennet.

On the upper reaches above Hungerford, where the river deep and placid flows through the luxuriant valley, the first mayflies had appeared on June 5. They were, it is true, merely single spies which precede the big battalions; and nearly all were devoured by the hungry small birds as soon as they emerged. I received a telegram and started as soon as possible. On

the following day, there was the first real rise of mayfly, though it did not begin until after six in the evening. The day had been dull, with cold north-easterly wind. But in the evening the sun broke forth with a very welcome warmth, and the mayfly appeared. It was a short rise, but a mad one while it lasted. The fish took leave of their senses and forgot their caution. They chased each other over the shallows, fighting and splashing for the best places. The instant that the sun was down, coldness and quiet settled upon the river, and the rise was over as suddenly as it began. I had caught three fish over a pound, but under two pounds, each, and I was fairly contented for the first evening. The next day was almost a repetition of the one before. There was a howling wind from the same unpleasant quarter; bright intervals of warming sun; again the first mayflies appeared at six in the evening, and the rise ceased with the coldness that came after the sunset. But the flies were fewer, and the fish never displayed the mad, incautious eagerness which had lasted for about half-an-hour on the day before. Again

I landed a brace and a half, each well over a pound, but not one over two pounds. The big fish had, so far as one could discover, not yet begun to take the mayfly.

On the Kennet, where there are plenty of trout over three pounds and a fair number over four pounds to be caught, one is entitled to expect during the mayfly season to get hold of really good fish. Upon the third day the weather was equally unpleasing, but mayflies began to float down about eleven, and I saw from the twittering and commotion among the birds that the feast was beginning early. I lost no time in pulling on waders, taking my rod, buckling on bag and landing-net, and hastening up to a meadow where I had determined to spend the day. The spot presented a combination of advantages which were not to be found elsewhere. In the first place, it was on the northern bank, so that this intolerable wind took one's line before it up-stream over the water. In the next place, the opposite bank was fringed at intervals with bushy willows which made fishing from that side difficult. Lastly, the greatest consideration of all was that

the fifty yards or so of river which could easily be cast over from the meadow always had the reputation of being the resort of large and free-rising trout. When I climbed over the gate from the road, and made my way over the moist and squishy surface of the meadow, I could hear across the fringe of flags and sedges by the bank the welcome noise which is sometimes made by a feeding trout. The wind blew odiously hard and cold. The willows waved and bent. The deep, placidly-flowing, clear greenish water of this particular piece of the river was broken with ugly wavelets. But a satisfactory hatch of mayfly was coming on, and fish were beginning to take them with good appetite. I was eager to begin, but spiked my rod into the meadow until such time as I had marked the rise of a fish worth killing.

I cannot recall without emotion the succession of disasters which ensued during the exciting hours that I spent in that meadow. One begins the day full of hope and virtuously resolving: Not to hurry and not to waste time; to pick out only good fish, and to stick to them instead of

wandering from place to place; not to cast too quickly or carelessly; to dry the fly thoroughly, so that it shall float properly, instead of flopping on the water and gradually getting soaked. Then excitement gets the better of caution. You show yourself unguardedly to the fish. You cast just when a gust blows your line round the top of your rod. You pick a long line hurriedly off the water, and crack off the fly behind you. For my part, I always think that when I have twice or thrice hopelessly entangled the line round the point of the rod, or got caught up in the wretched plantains behind, that it is time to retire from the bank, spike the rod into the ground, and enjoy a few minutes rest and reflection. These things happen more rarely when one begins the day, and I please myself by attributing them to fatigue, and not to natural clumsiness or bad fishing. There was no need for a long delay, which sometimes tries the angler on a dry-fly river. I had not been at the water's edge above a minute before a mayfly was taken with such a smack and splash as makes one's heart jump. Having drawn enough line off the reel to cover

the spot and made a successful cast, the new mayfly alighted on the water with its fresh grey wings erect, and floated upon the wavelets as a model mayfly should. My fish took it, and I tightened the line. I do not know an emotion comparable to a big trout rising to a floating artificial mayfly. You see your big fly; the trout's nose appears above the water; and before you know any more, the line is strained and the rod-point bent to the water. This fish made away up-stream and then down to the bottom to sulk. I was nervous but hopeful. Then, with a miserable sense of failure, I felt the hold of the fly give out and it came up to the surface. My second fish was a small one, who took the fly against my desire, and I loosed the line and let him off without the trouble of landing him in the net. But it meant time spent either in drying the soaked and well-mouthed mayfly or in putting on a fresh one before one could begin to fish again. I rose several more before I hooked another, and then came the first crushing misfortune. I got hold of a really big trout who had been rising quietly but steadily, as a big trout does, without shifting

his place more than a yard. The reel sang out as he perceived his mistake, and he dashed under the willows and broke me before I could collect myself for an effort to avert such a disaster. When I had repaired the damage and replaced the fly, not many minutes passed before I had hooked another as big or bigger. This time, to defeat the obvious manœuvre of a trout hooked opposite a willow whose branches sweep the water, I vowed I would be hard on him, and keep a short line. With my finger against the line, I pressed it to the rod and held him tight. He came to the surface rolling over and fighting like a real monster. It was a sight which made one tremble. I verily believe he was well over three pounds. Then the cast gave, though it was a new and a stout one, and I found myself shaking in the knees and almost ready to curse with vexation. I rose several more, and struck off a couple of flies in the fishes' mouths, before I stopped to rest and recover. I had never had a morning of such persistent failure in landing fish which I had fairly hooked. The afternoon passed like the morning, and I hooked another brace of

good fish. In one case the fly came away when I had played him to the verge of exhaustion, and was handling my landing-net to prepare for the last act. It was five o'clock, and I was despairing. I had lost six fish in succession, of which five were good trout, and two I had seen enough of to make certain that they were really big trout. There was nothing to be done but to reel in and take a rest, for I felt so hopeless that I did not care to go on fishing. Some tea at the Mill-house, and a smoke on the bench outside, restored my spirits and raised my hopes of saving a blank day. I was only concerned to break the spell by landing a fish ; for though I could hook them, some fatality seemed to prevent my getting one on to the bank. I will not dissemble the childish feeling of joy with which at last I pulled the landing net out of the strap, swung it forward to snap the joint of the handle, slipped it under a well-played trout who was floating upon his side, and lifted him in the net over the fringe of sedges on to the flowery edge of the meadow. He was a well-shaped trout, in firm condition, almost without

spots, of the old Kennet breed, as they call it. His weight by my little pocket spring-balance was 1 lb. 10 ozs. : a small trout for the Kennet, in the mayfly season, but I fished no more that evening. As soon as the sun was set, the odious wind dropped ; but the rise of fly ceased, and the quiet of the water was no longer disturbed. After days like this one seeks excuses for one's failure. I tried in vain to persuade myself it was through no fault of mine that the six trout had been lost in such disastrous succession. The truth is, one loses big fish as often as not through want of confidence. Each disaster makes matters worse.

VIII

It has chanced that for several seasons in succession I have first wetted my line in a very small Wiltshire trout-stream. This happy day usually falls at the end of April or the beginning of May, and it is the moment of the year that I look forward to most eagerly. The stream itself is so small that it seems to have no name, though it is marked on the one-inch maps of Wiltshire. Those who live in its neighbourhood call it simply "The Stream." It rises at the foot of the chalk-downs north of Tisbury and runs, after a short course, into the Nadder. The Nadder like the Wylye, flows ultimately into the Avon near Salisbury. So that this little nameless stream has very respectable connections, and one may with truth call it a miniature chalk-stream. Its water is transparently clear and an even flow is maintained by the chalk-springs during the drought of summer. The greater

portion is shallow, and the appearance of an angler on the bank will send the trout flying up-stream like arrows loosed from a bow. When I add that the stream itself is not much wider than a dining-room table, it will be evident that there is real gratification to be got by extracting from such water trout of over a pound in weight. It has not yet been my good fortune to land any two-pounders there. But I have seen them and have killed a fish of 1 lb. 15 ozs. Moreover, I verily believe that I must have had hold of one bigger than that when I was broken round the roots of the alders.

The portion of stream that I fish is the better part of a mile in length, and is bounded at the upper end by a cascade where the water makes its exit from the lake in a deer-park. Then follow four meadows which are partially irrigated by small channels, and, at the beginning of the fishing season, are gay with marsh-marigolds, orchids and all the other pleasing plants of damp pastures. A farm-road crosses the stream by a single-arched bridge, of honest grey stone, well-spotted with lichen and toned by weather. Below this is the usual haunt and

refuge of a very big trout which it appears to be vexatious and useless to try for. The valley is narrow, and each side, where the meadows cease, is thickly grown with copse-wood from which the cuckoos and singing birds send forth a very joyful chorus as one makes ready for the first day's fishing of the year. The stream itself is left in an absolutely neglected and natural condition. No stocking has been undertaken. The trout are poached by herons and, I doubt not, by human beings too. The weeds and sedges are never cut, and the banks in places are trodden down by cattle.

There is an astonishing contrast between the stream in April and the same piece of water in August. The clear stretches are choked with a rich growth of aquatic buttercup and water celery. The banks are over-hung with brambles and tall stems, so that one can scarcely approach, and still less easily find a place to cast the fly. I have only once fished there so late as August, but the day is memorable because I then, for the first time, learnt what big fish the water held and discovered how to catch them. This discovery must now be imparted.

In spite of what follows I am still convinced that in clear streams the biggest fish are, as a general rule, to be caught with a small fly fished over them from below as they hang against the stream rising at the food which passes. This is the foundation of the dry-fly, and no one that has attained reasonable skill can doubt its efficacy; though, as I have argued elsewhere, undue importance may be attached to the dryness of the fly. Imbued, then, with this notion, I used to fish the little Wiltshire stream with a dry-fly. Rising fish were never numerous; but usually about noon on a spring day there was a hatch of duns, and the trout used to take them. Then I used to watch for a rise and float an olive quill with oiled hackles over the spot.

It was hard work and one laboured well for one's fish. Many were put down, or rose short and fled. The alder trees, which in some places overhang the stream, made casting difficult. One lost flies in the grasses and sedges, and sweated profusely as one dried the fly with needlessly vigorous energy. But to a certain extent the system was successful and I knew no better.

One caught some fish of about a quarter of a pound ; and it never occurred to me that a sunk fly and a big one would produce bigger fish. Indeed, it was contrary to experience, and also contrary to every accepted doctrine among south-country chalkstream fishermen. So I used to waste the day watching and waiting for rising fish. The big fish never seemed to rise at the floating duns. But I worked away with the dry-fly and came away contented with half-a-dozen trout averaging in weight something between a quarter and half a pound. It seemed a very decent basket to get from so small a stream. There is a great charm, too, about all one catches from unstocked and untended water. The fish are wild, true, English trout. No hatchery has contributed to produce them, and no stew-pond stock has ever been turned in.

The stream is very little fished, and upon only two occasions have I had the company of other anglers. Once I went there with a fashionable fisherman who had a rod on one of the most select bits of the Itchen. He found the rising fish too few, and soon gave up in disgust.

Upon another occasion I had for companion a brother angler, whose skill as a fisherman always fills me with envy and admiration. His versatility is endless. His power of keeping out of sight is unequalled. He is a master of all the arts and crafts of anglers including the dry-fly. This fellow fisherman, in whose company I have spent some happy days, has taught me many things for which I shall always be grateful. It was he who first declared that with a big fly, fished downstream, we should get hold of the bigger fish. I was incredulous, but was perforce converted when he produced for my inspection four or five trout weighing about a pound and a half each.

Next time that I fished I put his advice to the test. It was, as I have said, in August when southern trout-streams seem already autumnal, and the fisherman's year has passed its prime. I put on a large red sedge-fly such as one uses on the Kennet on summer nights during that glorious short half-hour of dusk. I wetted it well and soaked the wings so that it should drown as soon as I cast it. The banks were so overgrown that the business of getting near the water

unseen was not difficult. It was a harder task to throw a long line without getting entangled. Wherever the concealment afforded by the vegetation allowed, I shortened my line ; but in many places it was needful to throw a fairly long line and let the stream carry it down before beginning to work it upwards with enticing jerks which make the artificial fly struggle and (as I have often heard fishermen describe it) mimic nature. Though whether it be the nature of an insect so to behave I cannot say. In this way, where the stream is at all brisk, one can command water at a distance. One can search the runs between the weed-beds and let the fly work under the banks where fish conceal themselves. There is but a single important rule, and that is, by one means or another, to keep out of sight. This rule must not be infringed, for the trout in this little Wiltshire stream are exceedingly wild and shy. Sometimes, where the stream makes a bend, one can let the fly be carried round the corner and search out places that are totally out of sight from the spot where one is standing.

I had not fished a quarter of the stream in

the first water-meadow, crouching as I went, and kneeling as I drew in the line with little pulls, when the fly was taken with such a tug that my heart almost stopped beating. The reel screeched for a moment, and when I checked it there was such a splashing and commotion in the water that I knew I had hold of a trout worth catching. So it proved, and I showed little mercy in playing him and netting him out, before he recovered and went for the weeds. He pulled down the balance to 1 lb. 6 oz., and was many times bigger than any that I had caught before. I had never seen a change in the style of fishing so markedly successful. This trout was not unique ; for the day produced a brace more, if I remember rightly, about the same size as the first one.

When spring came, and I again had a day at the opening of the fishing season, the same methods proved successful. It was a real April day, with light north-westerly wind and gleams of fleeting sunshine between the dark clouds. The little stream seemed once more very familiar when I got there. Every bend and stretch I remembered well, and wasted no time in fishing

water where there are no fish lurking. I peeped over the stone bridge cautiously, but the big old trout was not in his usual place. Could he be dead? If so, had he been caught, or had he died a natural death during the winter? I was not sorry that he was gone, for his presence was always a temptation to spend time on the futile task of offering him a fly. About noon a few duns appeared in the air and on the water. I saw only one or two trout rise; but they came well at the big sunk fly considering the coldness of the weather. I do not believe that under such conditions as these the pattern of the fly counts for much. A good big dressing for the trout to see it and a large sized hook to hold them are the chief things. If the trout are taking they come with a rush and a snap and hook themselves. I fished with a good big Greenwell, but an alder is a safe fly to try when one is in doubt. I fished the long line down-stream, let the fly explore the holes under the willow stumps, and the cavities at the sides of the banks. The day began somewhat disastrously by losing five fish in succession. There can be

no doubt that fishing down-stream you do not hook your trout so securely as when you are below and have to strike. Again, when he is hooked, there is less control until you have reeled in and got below. Then the course of events changed; and though I lost several other fish, by the end of the day I had landed five much bigger ones than I ever got with my old method. It was, if I remember rightly, on this April day that, letting the fly be carried down over a deep hole under some bushes, I got hold of a fish that weighed only an ounce under two pounds. It was a joyful moment when he was landed. Events like that live in the memory, and make one cheerful for a long time.

About two or three in the afternoon there descended a storm of snow and rain, which finished the day. I came away well-contented with the experience I had gained, but still believing the maxim, "the bigger the fly, the bigger the fish," not to be one of universal application.

One may sometimes get trout-fishing in most unexpected places. On the southern slope of Ashdown Forest there are some large oakwoods,

remains, perhaps, of the ancient Sussex Weald; and in the woods lie some smallish ponds, formed by a little stream which ultimately flows into the Sussex Ouse above Lewes. I cannot pretend that the first aspect of the spot or the water suggested trout. On one side of the upper pond was a sloping meadow with a band of rushes along the edge of the water. The other side was overhung with scrub composed of alders, and oaks. At the bottom of the pond was a dam, with a sluice, through which a fair trickle of water flowed; and across the dam ran a cart track with deep ruts in the clay. The stream from the pond had cut a hollow bed through the copse below the dam, and formed another smaller pond about fifty or a hundred yards from the upper one. This pool was deeper and somewhat clearer than the top pond; but so densely surrounded by coppice, and overgrown by the spreading branches of oak trees, that there was one spot only from which one could throw a fly with any comfort. It was about eleven o'clock on a May morning when I arrived across the meadow, at the edge of the upper pond. The

sun was shining brightly and made the brown surface of the muddy water sparkle. The wind was very light and blew from the north-east, too gently to ruffle the stillness. Some tree-pipits were singing at the edge of the wood and from its recesses came the soothing notes of turtle-doves. The distant rounded backs of the South Downs looked hazy, and I did not put together my rod with any great anticipations. But it was the first day's fishing of the year, and the music of the reel, as I drew off the line and passed it through the rings, sounded very melodious.

For a fly I selected a small Greenwell, and then made a few haphazard casts over the rushes to soak the gut and try the rod. I confess that the attempt seemed fairly hopeless, though I had been told that a trout had been caught here last year weighing 1½ lb. On the opposite side of the water some small flies were dancing under the shade of the oak branches, and I noticed with satisfaction fish rising there. I imagined that they must be roach or dace, but determined to lose no time and see in any case whether they would look at my fly. There was a small crazy

sort of punt moored to the post and rails which ran across the dam, and I got in and pushed over to the other side. Here I made fast to the alders, and let out the cord until I drifted along the bank to within casting distance of the fish which continued rising merrily. I got out some line, and judging the distance as carefully as possible, dropped the fly as though it had fallen from the branches. It was instantly taken. I hastily drew in the line through the rings, and will admit that I was never more astonished than when a nice trout of a quarter of a pound appeared splashing on the surface at the side of the punt. I had so little faith in the existence of these Sussex woodland trout that I had not thought it worth while to bring a landing net. I let him struggle for a minute then grasped the cast and lifted him into the boat. Without moving from the spot, I added three more to the basket. They had evidently not been molested by anglers, and took the fly boldly. The next two were got over against a willow bush, at another spot, on the same side of the pond. At noon they all simultaneously ceased rising. I punted back

to the dam and just gave a last cast near the side of the sluice. The fly was taken well sunk as I was reeling in, and this made my seventh fish. I tried casting here and there in a desultory way ; but nothing came of it, so I was content to sit down in the shade and count my fish.

The sun was getting low when I came back in the late afternoon and settled to devote myself to the lower pond. The long shadows of the trees were cast upon the water, and, where beams of light penetrated, clouds of gnats were dancing up and down in company. The prospect of adding to the basket seemed good, for the surface was dimpled with the circles of rising fish, and the water seemed to be be alive with hungry trout. Little ones were jumping bodily out of the water ; whilst bigger fellows rose more shyly under the bushes near the sides, sometimes with a sucking sound and a good ring that spread over the surface. I began fishing hurriedly with the same loch-fly that I had used in the morning and immediately got caught up behind. The tackle came back unbroken when I pulled, with an oak leaf on the hook. Not a fish would look

at the fly, though they went on rising in a way that drove one distracted with annoyance. They appeared to be taking something very small that danced on the surface of the water. I then fortunately remembered some black gnats on ooo-hooks in another fly box. This change was immediately successful. The fly was taken as soon as it touched the water by the best fish that I had yet caught. I played him till exhaustion was evident and towed him on his side to the edge, knelt down and lifted him thankfully on to the grass. Then followed a succession of misfortunes. I lost my fly in the branches, and when I looked for another, found that only two black gnats remained. The best fish were apparently rising on the side where it was impossible to cast without the certainty of being caught in the bushes at every throw. I could not afford to waste flies, so made my way cautiously round, and having shortened the line, poked my rod over the bushes, and dapped the little black fly on the water beneath. The bank was steep and I could see all that happened below. It was, without exaggeration, a moment of

fearful emotion when what appeared to be quite a big trout came up, deliberately opened his jaws, and took it. But the sequel was unlucky. The fish dashed hither and thither, then gave a rush into the bank below me, and the fly came back. It was really heart-breaking, but as some more good rises appeared in a few moments near the spot, I determined to try once more. Again I dangled the little black fly on the surface, and again it was at once taken. This fish I landed with infinite difficulty. I kept a tight line and the rod-point over him so that he swam round and round in a circle until he turned on his side. Then I fixed the rod in the bushes and crawled on my hands and knees under the bushes to the edge so as to get hold of the line just over the water. In this way I pulled the fish ashore. He was well hooked and fairly played out. It was a good deal of trouble and anxiety for a quarter-pound trout; and I doubted, as I wiped the blood off my cheek and picked the thorns out of my hands, whether it was worth it. Then came the next misfortune. When I got back on to the top of the bank and picked up my rod I gave

a pull to release the line which dangled in the water, and the fly remained somewhere in the alders. I had only one black gnat left now. I took, therefore, extra trouble in sucking the gut and tying the knot securely, determined that before it went (as it infallibly must in such a place) it should catch me another fish. I walked round now to the more open part, where the stream ran out of the pond over a flat stone, whence with a little care one could put one's fly over a good part of the water. There were spreading rings of rising fish within reach ; and it was a relief not to poke out the rod over the bushes, with the feeling that when you had hooked your fish you were not much nearer landing him than before. The sun was now setting, and the pond was mostly shaded. Myriads of gnats danced lustily over the surface, and the smaller fish jumped out in their eagerness to make a meal. I noticed, however, a bigger trout within reach of the bank who only poked his nose and back out of the water. He came up every few seconds with a good head and tail rise and a smack of the lips. I set my heart on getting

him. The first cast fell short, and I hastily lifted the line, which made a splash, but in a moment he rose again. The next fell lightly beyond him, and he came at the fly as it passed over, but missed. A moment later he was rising again, swimming about, and feeding steadily at the surface. I gave him about a minute's rest and then got out line for the next attack. Then, stupidly enough, I thought I could reach better from another point. I walked backwards, waving the rod above my head to keep the fly off the water. There was a sickening tug behind me, and the last fly together with half the cast remained in the upper branches of an oak tree. A few minutes later the sun was down, the multitude of gnats abruptly vanished and thereupon the trout no longer broke the surface of the pond with their circles. I had nine trout in my bag. Though from a Sussex pond, they were not flavoured with the Sussex soil. There are several big ones left, who may yet be alive, though I have never had an opportunity of going back to them. My three flies are also, I suppose, still firmly fixed in the trees round the pond.

IX

PERSERVANCE and practice are the most unfailing ways of learning how to catch trout. But one can get useful hints from books on fishing. There is also much instruction to be gained both from visits to new water and from conversations with experienced fishermen. The angler who has never extended his observations beyond the immediate neighbourhood of his own home can have no notion how greatly trout vary in appearance, habits, tastes and nature. I have sometimes tried to explain to a ghillie the manner in which trout are fished for on southern chalkstreams with a single floating fly; but I do not believe that any real image of, say, the Itchen and its trout was ever conveyed to his mind. Once upon a loch in Glengarry on a brilliant still morning the trout were taking the large duns which floated on the glassy surface. Every fly for many yards around on the sheet of water

could be counted; every rise left a clear ring on the loch. I made the man row into the bank while I took off the three loch-flies and put on a single rough olive which floated perfectly and looked the very double of the flies on the loch. I cast it from the boat, when we put off, and let the current gently float my fly to the spot where there were most rings. The ghillie was grim and incredulous; indeed, I doubt whether he appreciated the object of our proceedings. But he relaxed and fairly roared with laughter at our success when a trout came up with a dash from the depths of the loch and was hooked. The trout was small and the labour of putting a dry-fly over him too great to repay one, but it was amusing and instructive to the Highlander.

It is the same with a man who has never left the South and hears of small Highland lochs where hardy little trout are so greedy for the fly, that they throw themselves out of water and miss the object which they dash at. I am convinced that nothing serves an angler better, if he wants to gain a systematic and general view of the fisherman's art, than to avail himself of

every opportunity of fishing every sort of trout-water. These thoughts were forced into my mind when I happened one day to have been fishing the Beane in Hertfordshire, and less than a week later, without any intermediate fishing, was wading and casting round the edge of a little nameless mountain loch in Inverness-shire. It was trout-fishing in each case, and both days were delightful in their respective ways ; but the contrast between the fish and the fishing on these two days was incredibly strange.

Let me first make an attempt to describe the Beane and its trout. The part that I was fishing was a few miles above Hertford. It is a small stream running through meadows which are closely grazed by cattle. Here and there it skirts a wood or is over-hung by big solitary trees. The water is not extraordinarily limpid or pure, yet clear and weedless enough for you to see every fish, and, unfortunately, for them to see you almost as easily. There is no herbage or sedge to make a covert for the fisherman's concealment. The edges of the stream are dry, bare, and close-cropped. Numerous fences of barbed wire must be mentioned to complete the picture.

But, as in many Hertfordshire streams, it is not so much the clearness of the water as the shallowness which confronts the angler with difficulties. If you approach the edge at all incautiously, waves from retreating fish, scattering before you, disturb the surface, and the forms of the big trout vanish up and down-stream in a fashion that makes you feel so hopeless that you are inclined to pack up and go home at once. There were not a great number of fish in the water, but they were all apparently of respectable size. Most that I saw were over two pounds and the complete absence of small fish was remarkable. Although it was the end of May and seasonably warm, the trout hardly rose at all and never steadily to the fly on the water. Yet, between the hours of twelve and three, there was a continuous and plentiful hatch of small, light-coloured duns. The fish that one saw rise, did so in a desultory fashion at long intervals. I settled myself below a big trout that lay in the run between some weeds. I had watched him rise twice and select with slow and cautious deliberation some invisible morsel that passed. I think the weed-bed must have

screened me from his view, for I put many flies of varied patterns over his head without alarming him. Olives, iron-blue duns, red quills and black gnats, passed floating unnoticed, and then were lifted, waved to and fro, dried, and offered again. From time to time he gave me hope, for he was a feeding fish ; and about once in five minutes he rose and took some morsel between his lips. It is sometimes a mistake to stick too long to a rising fish ; and, also, often a mistake to move too rapidly from one rising fish to another. In this case there was no choice, for no other fish were rising in view. So I fished for this one big trout until I was tired of changing flies and stiff with kneeling on the bank. The moment that I was up, he sighted me, and sped away up the stream. Yet the time had not been uselessly employed ; for I might have caught him, and a brace of trout like that would have made a good day and given one a pleasant remembrance of the Beane. Stupidly enough, among the various flies, I had not tried an alder, which is often attractive to these big fastidious Hertfordshire trout. Later in the day I noticed a solitary

fish, of a couple of pounds or more, cruising about a stretch of slack water and rising capriciously at one thing and another that attracted his attention as he swam near the surface. Having then an alder at the end of my cast, I stepped back out of sight, approached on my knees, and dropped the fly not far from his nose. My cruising trout altered his course and swam round, making a critical inspection of the floating alder, which, I am bound to say, bore very little real resemblance to *Sialis lutaria*, the natural insect. At last, after some seconds during which my heart thumped against my ribs, he opened his mouth (letting me see into a capacious pink cavity) and closed his lips upon the fly. I struck too hard, and am ashamed to describe the disaster which followed.

A few days later I was in Scotland, far from the railway, in a deer-forest on the border between the counties of Ross and Inverness. Those who have not seen the Highlands when the birches are freshly leafed and the cuckoos vociferous, when the larches are unnaturally green and the dim blue hills still patched with white snow, cannot imagine how delightful spring can be in

Scotland. You miss the purple colour of the heather but are repaid by the cries of peewits and the bubbling calls of curlews. The trout also rise to your wet-flies as they rarely do in autumn. The little loch that I have mentioned lies concealed in a boggy depression among the hills. Later in the year a great part of it is crowded over with yellow water-lilies, but in May or June it is an easy business to wade round the shallow edge and cast into the deeper water. There was no shyness about the trout, and their sole anxiety seemed lest they should be too slow in rising at the three big loch-flies. A steady breeze blew off the western shore and ruffled the surface in the most desirable fashion. It is strange that catching such small and uncritical trout should prove, as it always does to me, a source of great amusement and satisfaction. It was, if I remember rightly, Talleyrand who said of his wife: "*Sa bêtise me repose.*" So one feels with these silly loch-trout on days when they are rising freely. It is a relief after the cautious toil with which one fishes for the gut-shy and fastidious trout of the Beane to cast at

random and boldly draw the flies through the peaty water of a secluded loch. It is an agreeable change to stand upright when you have been compelled to fish crouching ; to throw your flies gaily over trout who are ravenous, instead of nervously hoping to delude a fish who has been taught caution by many pricks from hooks and narrow escapes from landing nets. There is no doubt that the stupidity of these small Northern trout who rarely see an angler is very reposeful when one comes from the South. I had not made more than three casts when a couple of small fish hurled themselves out of the water and fell back, having both unfortunately missed the flies. But they were not to be denied : I cast again into the rings they made, and one was promptly hooked. So the fishing went on along the side of the loch, wading, casting and rising something at every cast. If one made six casts without moving a trout, it set one wondering what had come over the fish. The little trout, when they were hooked, fought like fury and many freed themselves or fell back as they were hastily landed. At the end of an hour I selected

a dry brown patch of heather to sit upon, and turned out the contents of my bag upon the grass. Twenty-five little trout, not one of which weighed a quarter of a pound, had been bagged, and at least as many more lost. The rises must have numbered hundreds. On these occasions the conscientious fisherman, who takes pride in his art, ought to blame himself for not having bagged many more of the trout who have risen at his flies. That the trout are small need not disturb him, for the loch holds very few of much better size. Small and voracious though these little loch-trout sometimes are, they may be extremely capricious. In the present case twenty-three out of the twenty-five were caught on the same fly, which was a red-and-teal of the same size apparently as the other two flies on the cast. When I began fishing again, they had for some undiscoverable reason almost ceased rising. The causes which make all the trout in a loch simultaneously stop rising or begin to take the artificial flies is one of the great unexplained mysteries of fishing. We know very little of what is going on in the brown peaty waters of the lochs. On the Beane we can at least generally see what the trout are engaged in doing.

X

One may sometimes get a deal of pleasure out of humble trout from small burns. If you know that there are big fish in the water it is, of course, disgusting to catch nothing but small ones. But if you are getting as big trout as can be expected, you may be happy though the fish are neither large nor numerous. Once I had not fished for a long time, and consequently felt a strong desire to catch a trout again. It would be hard to imagine less hopeful conditions than I found in the North on my arrival from London. The drought had lasted three weeks; a glaring sun shone in a cloudless sky; a strong east wind was blowing down-stream; a mere trickle of water ran over the shallows; and the pools were so clear that you could see the fish at the bottom as you looked into the still, peaty, brown water. But when one has but a few days for fishing and the season is the month

of May in Scotland, it is possible to have caught nothing and yet to have spent a day fishing happily. It is rather difficult to describe the little river, which rises in some peat-bog on the moors, and flows after a course of seven or eight miles into the sea. In the lower part salmon and sea-trout may be got in the autumn. Just above the sea-pools the river runs, for a couple of miles, mostly through plantations of spruce-fir and sycamore. It is pretty to look at, but not much favoured by the burn-trout. I therefore started after breakfast with my rod and my bag, and walked about three miles up the high-road to a spot where this salmon river, having become a mere burn, emerges from the woods into the open pastures. It was three years since I had fished there; but I remembered perfectly every yard of the water, every deep place where there used to be trout, every shallow place that was hopeless, every turn and winding in the course, and every stony or boggy spot along the banks. It was August when I last was there, now it was May, and I was hopeful, and full of plans for catching trout. I turned from the dusty road,

climbed over a gate in the low stone-wall, and walked across a rushy piece of pasture where shaggy cattle and black-faced sheep, with little lambs, were feeding. When I reached the stream the lowness of the water made my heart sink. Nevertheless I began to put up my rod and fix on the reel. I will not dissemble the excitement I felt. The further one walked up, the more enchanting did the surroundings become. The air was full of song from skylarks; pairs of peewits called and swooped around me; the warble of willow-wrens came from the plantations behind; and many a cuckoo, shouting his loudest, told one that it was spring. Few persons other than the Highlanders have the pleasure of hearing the cuckoo in the Highlands. I had never done so before, and I then determined that no year must pass in future without my doing so. I picked out a cast of the finest gut. It was an old one, which had seen use, but seemed sound enough; and I always hate to embark on a new piece of curly, stiff gut. Having knotted it to the reel line, I cast it into the burn to soak, laid down the rod, and turned to the tin box which

held small flies on eyed-hooks. I am a great believer in a single fly for fishing small streams or any running water with stones or weeds. Being little troubled with a great variety of patterns, I easily settled on a small March-brown ; and the gut being properly soaked, I passed it through the eye of the hook and tied the well-known knot. I then slung my bag over my back, and started to walk up the bank to a place where I knew that I should be able to cross. The plovers, in dismay at my movements, flapped and screamed overhead to entice me from their nests. For some distance the burn was about ten feet across, flowing in ripples, clear and shallow, over the pebbles. But soon after reaching the place where one could cross, there was a stony, muddy spot where cattle drank, and below this a bend, with deep water under the further bank. The rich, clear, brown water was flecked with foam, and the hollowed, peaty bank gave it a hopeful appearance. I retired a short distance away, and there knelt upon a flat stone and began to get out my line. Each cast sent the fly a little nearer to the deep place. I

let it sink and drew it back ; then came that quiver of the line or rod-top which means that a fish has touched the fly under water. I struck, and the line flew back overhead with a little trout at the end. He was so small that I will say no more about him. After being hurled through the air he lay dusty and bruised upon the stones, firmly hooked and punished for his voracity. Had he been unhurt, I would have returned him ; as it was, I put him in the bag and rejoiced that it was not to be a blank day. Other places up the stream were all fished ineffectually ; I crouched and sat and knelt upon the banks, but hooked nothing except the tops of the rushes behind me. It was noon when I reached a place which I well remembered. An arched bridge of grey stone carried a cartway over the stream to a small farm-house just beyond. There were some calves in the water, and it looked as though they would have disturbed the big, deep pool below the bridge. I made a wide circuit, and saw flies dancing in the sunlight above the water, and trout frequently rising in different parts of the pool. They were clearly fair-sized trout for the

burn, and not smaller than five to a pound. I hoped that they might be a quarter of a pound. On one side of the bank were some bushes; below the pool were the calves; the embankment which supported the road made it impossible to get out a line with comfort on the other side, if one stood on a level with the water. I determined to stand back on the bridge and cast from there, trusting to fortune if I hooked a fish. I began with care, so as not to disturb the water. The fish went on rising freely, and I was so sure I should get one in a moment, that my hands trembled. At last I sent my fly down near the rises, and a fish took it greedily and was hooked. I hastily pulled in the line through the rings, and attempted to swing the fish on to the bank below the bridge. Ah! fool that I was. The line was too long. He struck the bank and fell back with a disgusting splash. I could not conceal my anguish nor the childish rage I felt against him. When I had sufficiently recovered, I examined the fly and began to fish again. Once more I hooked a fish, once more hurry and excitement got the better of prudence, and I tried

to land him too soon. But this time, mercifully, the fish struck a buttress of the bridge and fell on to the stones below. I hastened round to secure him, to wash off the dust, to admire his red spots and beautiful shape, and to lay him to rest in my bag. Again, after a moment's interval, I hooked another, and swore that I would not be in a hurry. The result was that this fish, after fighting vigorously, got under the bridge, and when I pulled up my line the fly and the fish were gone. I repaired the loss philosophically, and blamed the carelessness of using so old a cast. The next fish I got was the best of the day. I reeled him in and kept a tight line. From the parapet of the bridge I could watch his movements. No salmon was ever treated with greater caution or respect. I kept him going till every symptom of exhaustion had set in, and then drew him gasping on to the shelving pebbles, and seized him in my hand. Happiness was now complete. Two decent trout, and enough for a breakfast dish at least were in the bag. The pool at the bridge produced no more rises, so I determined to walk up as far as the water was fishable

and then turn down and fish as I returned. The burn above the farm-house soon changed its character, and became narrower and deeper, running mostly between peaty and stony banks. The pastures became rougher, more full of rushes and big stones. I put up many snipe, and surprised a heron. The peewits followed me in relays, anxious and vociferous. In this upper part, with infinite labour and sweat, I secured four more tolerable trout. I sat sideways on the bank working my way down stream, throwing as long a line as I dared, with gorse-bushes and rushes behind me. The sun baked my neck and midges bit me, many trout rose short or fell back, and when I had got half a dozen I was frankly too tired to want to fish any more. In this burn which I have just described, the best fishing is to be had near the source and right up in the hills, where the stream is quite narrow.

But I have lively recollections of another burn, where the best pools are close to the sea-shore and you follow its course fishing among the sandhills.

On the north coast of Islay, which is one of

the largest of the Inner Hebrides, there is a semi-circle of dunes, which is washed by the waters of the Atlantic ; the spot is called Kilanalan Bay, and on a bright summer morning, when the sand is yellow and the sea is blue, it is a beautiful place. In the middle of the bay a small, meandering burn descends from the moors behind, and wandering through the sandhills, discharges itself into the sea. At the top of the windy crest of the sand-hills there is a dismal, white-washed farmhouse, past which the burn flows in a narrow bed full of brown peaty water. But, having passed the farm, it runs down rapidly over stones and enters a flat bit of country, where it assumes a more even course. This flat stretch is bounded on either side by the links, covered with stiff sea-grass, honeycombed with rabbit burrows and swept by the strong sea breezes. The valley through the sandhills opens out towards the sea, and ends in flats, partly marshy and partly covered with sound and close-cropped turf. For some way below the farm the burn is too narrow, too rapid, and too shallow, to hold trout. But, from the point between the sandhills where it enters the flats to

the spot in the bay where the brown water loses itself in the sands of the sea its possibilities for fishing are altered. The whole length of this piece is not many hundred yards, if all the turns of its serpentine course across the flats are straightened out and counted. But there is a chance here for an angler who has sufficient sense not to despise a humble stream to fill a small creel. It must be confessed that the appearance of the water is not, at first sight, attractive. The upper part has the aspect of a sulky black ditch overgrown with flags and rushes ; the lowest part is broad and clear, like the pools of sea-water left by the receding tide. Between the two there is a stretch, enclosed by narrow and overhanging banks, where a succession of deep, peaty pools, connected by narrow weedy places, hold the best fish.

I will not try to conceal the feelings of distrust with which I inspected the water the first time that I was there, nor the doubt I felt at the possibility of doing much with a fly. The August sun shone from a bright and cloudless heaven, but a strong north wind blew in from the bay and ruffled the lowest and clearest pools. I walked down to the

shore. A flock of small ringed-plovers rose from the edge of the lowest pool, flew like one bird for a turn in the air, and settled together at the same instant lower down on the sands. I sat down upon a grassy mound to put up my rod, select a strong cast well stained in coffee, and tie on a single fly dressed upon an eyed-hook. I hesitated for a moment as to the size and pattern, but experience has since proved that the humour of the trout is of more importance than the kind of fly. I have tried them with a variety of loch-flies, with small flies such as one uses on the Test and with little silver-bodied Alexandras and Butchers. When these trout were in the mood for rising they rose at anything, and there have been days, too, when one failed absolutely. Not a fish would come at any fly, and though I have kept careful note I cannot connect it with any condition of weather. This time I began with a Zulu, a moderate-sized black fly, with a red wool tag, which certainly attracts Scotch trout, though I do not know whether they have seen any insect alive like it. Upon the whole, I am inclined to think that more and larger trout rose to the bigger flies, but that may have

been chance. The lowest stretch was so sandy at the bottom, and so close to the sea, that it seemed as though it must hold brackish water. The end lost itself in the sands of the seashore. At the upper part, however, the stream took a turn ; and under the hollowed, flat, turfy bank there was a long, deepish pool of sherry-coloured water. The wind was up-stream, and took out my line pleasantly. It also put some fine rippling waves over the surface of the water. I stood far back on the sands, and dropped my fly as close as I could under the further bank. There was a bold rise, and I threw out a little, hard-struggling trout on to the sand behind me. By the time I could pick him up and loosen the hook from his lips, he had jumped and wriggled till he was sandy from head to tail. I tapped his head on my boot, washed him in the water, and slipped him into my bag. The same pool, in the same way, produced five others of the same size. There was no water to be wasted, and I fished each inch with the greatest care. These six trout weighed a pound together or possibly less, but never were any caught so prettily spotted, so lively, and in such firm condition. The next

bit of the burn was very broad, shallow, clear, and stagnant. It was a long, lake-like pool, with buck-bean in the water and thrift growing round the edge. I fished it over, dropping the fly near the tufts of buckbean, and sometimes getting caught in the roots. This water produced only one trout, who was lying near the bank under the thick leathery leaves of the buckbean. The next part of the burn was totally different. Here began a series of oval pools (of very deep and dark water) just ruffled by the wind, but otherwise quite still and black in the sunshine. The largest of these pools may have been five feet across, and three times as long. Purple loose-strife and peppermint and rushes overhung the sides ; and between each pool there was a narrow, weedy neck through which the peaty water seemed to flow with difficulty. The wind was gusty, and there often was only just enough open water to put the fly on. The first pool, if one may call this long and narrow ditch by that name, produced the best trout of the day, and the only one which I could not throw out on to the bank as I struck him. I had lost the first fly in a gorse bush, and put on another

Zulu, which I sucked for a moment to make sure that it would sink. I cast, and the fly was taken as soon as it sank, and I had tightened the line. I struck hard, and brought up, fighting and splashing, a trout larger than I had expected. He seemed a monster, and proved, eventually, under half a pound. I dragged him down stream, he fighting desperately, and I reeling in as fast as I could. The moment he ceased these struggles I grasped the gut, which luckily was strong, and lifted him on to the bank. It was the best moment of the day.

Each pool in succession produced its trout, and sometimes more than one. If one fish had been neatly and quickly jerked out from the lower end of the pool, there was often another against the rushes at the top who was ready to take the fly when it was presented to him. Sometimes, as unfortunately so often happens, the best fish were the most lightly hooked, and dropped back with an odious flop. I fished with as short and tight a line as possible, struck hard, and with the same motion of the rod swung the little fish on to the grass before he had enough recovered from his

shock to struggle. Although the fish were small, the pleasure of catching each one under such conditions was peculiar. Some of the stream was so thickly overgrown along the edge with flags and reeds that one could approach, by stooping, within a foot or two. Then the rod was advanced over the edge, the wind carried out a little line, and the fly hovered over the water before it settled. This method of fishing I found succeeded where it was impossible to cast in the proper sense. The biggest fish in the burn, I noticed, took the fly, as a rule, when it touched the water. So quickly did they rise at it, and so hard did they pull, before one lifted them out, that I never could get over the surprise they gave. The smaller fish came at the fly when it had sunk a little, and was being drawn back. The more vigorously the fly was worked in jerks across the water, the smaller were the fish that rose, and the more persistently did they dash at it and hook themselves. I had now reached the limit of fishable water ; and the little burn had become a narrow, black ditch, full of water weeds, with the peat water oozing between them. But for the weeds,

which made fly-fishing quite impossible, I doubt not, it would have produced some excellent trout. If there was any depth and a square foot of clear water among the floating leaves of the plants, it was worth dropping the fly upon it.

I sat down to count over the fish, and found them one short of the two dozen. I had thrown back about half as many others, too small to kill. It was now well on into the afternoon ; so after eating my luncheon, I walked down to the lowest pools on the shore, and fished the whole burn over again. The clear pools on the sands produced nothing. A little higher up three good fish fell back in succession, which is trying to the temper. But six more little trout were got, and the whole bag from the day's fishing was twenty-nine. None of these, I venture to think, were too small to kill, but I must admit that none were monsters. The pleasures of the day's fishing were great. There was the first surprise, when the dark-brown stream meandering among the sand-hills produced such unexpected trout. There was the varied excitement as one approached the different pools, and wondered what each might

hold. Lastly, there was the unusual pleasure of catching trout on the seashore, with the smell of seaweed and the salt of the sea-breeze in the air. It is certainly a much greater amusement to fill one's creel with troutlets from a burn than from a loch.

XI

Loch-fishing stands by itself. It is the easiest form of fly-fishing for trout. As far as skill goes, very little practice is required to fish from a boat, casting the flies on the open water of a lake, with the wind behind one. But loch-fishing presents more unsolved problems than any other variety of angling, salmon-fishing always excepted. Why trout sometimes rise freely to the artificial loch-fly, and sometimes ignore it, no man knows. We all know that as a general rule a mild day is better than a cold one, a cloudy sky better than a bright one, a breeze better than a calm. We may speculate as to the reasons, but no one can lay down the law with certainty. More mysterious still are the causes which on the same day make loch-trout suddenly rise or cease rising at the artificial flies. The conditions remain apparently the same. Yet a great number of fish are simultaneously affected by the same cause.

That a hatch of natural insects has often nothing to do with it, seems clear; for we see that there is no natural fly about and the trout are not rising at anything except our artificials. Sometimes we see loch-trout taking duns, or midges, or daddy-long-legs, and we catch them with artificial copies. There is no doubt, then, why the trout rise at our flies. But often when there is natural fly on the water the trout rise freely at artificial flies of a pattern that bears no resemblance to the insect on the loch surface, or indeed to any insect that we know of. We must remember that loch-trout find the bulk of their food at the bottom and in the weeds. I have seen it suggested that the Zulu, which is a standard pattern and very successful in Scotland, resembles a species of pond-snail, on which trout feed. But who can tell what the trout really take it for? It is also like a water-beetle. I believe that, as a rule, it is the movement and not the colour and dressing which make loch-trout dash at our fly.

There are days when trout in lochs show a marked predilection for some one particular pattern. But so far as my experience goes, such

days are exceptional and even rare. Usually one gets about as many fish on one fly as on another out of a cast of three or four standard patterns. Perhaps, had one hit upon the right fly for the particular time and place, one would have killed many more trout. There again we are in the dark and may as well confess it. It may be that a fly which is favoured by the trout on a certain day owes its success to the fact that it is the tail-fly, or the top-dropper, on the cast rather than to the fact that it is of a particular colour and pattern. This can be tested and proved by experiment. Every one has their favourite loch-flies. In a loch it is as well to give the trout a reasonable choice and to fish with three flies, but I doubt whether much advantage is got by putting on more than four flies at a time. For my own part, were I condemned to fish always with a cast of the same four patterns, I would choose a *March-Brown*, a *Zulu*, a *Teal-and-Claret* and a *Red-Palmer*. I do not believe that one would be at any great disadvantage compared with the angler who carries a hundred patterns to make his selection from. It is certain that one would be saved much doubt

or hesitation whether a change of flies were desirable and some little waste of time in changing. The old angling saying, that he catches most trout whose flies are longest in the water, is more true in loch-fishing than in any other branch of the angler's art. But at best it is an exaggeration of the truth.

It is probable that skill counts for more in loch-fishing than we imagine. This is borne out by the records of tournaments and competitions which are held on Loch Leven. The best men win the prizes for the heaviest baskets year after year. It is clear that this success is due to the anglers' skill and knowledge and not to luck. Nor can one attribute it entirely to the boatman taking his employer over the best fishing grounds.

The loch-angler's skill is tested chiefly at two points. First, in persuading the trout to rise to the flies, some art is required; but it is difficult to lay down rules for achieving success. Sometimes trout come at the flies when they touch the surface, sometimes when they are well sunk. Sometimes they appear to be attracted by flies drawn smartly through the water. Sometimes the top-dropper may be allowed with success just

to touch the ripples and to rise and fall with them. Secondly, in hooking the trout when it rises, skill may count for much. But here it is even more difficult to say to what one fisherman's success and another's failure is due. Usually a loch-trout takes the fly in his mouth boldly and hooks himself as he goes down. He rises with a dash and in most cases is hooked or lost before we know that we have had a rise. Yet there are sometimes days when one gets hundreds of rises and fails to hook more than a very few. "The fish are coming short," says the boatman ; and he seems to think that explains one's want of success. But I always feel convinced that on such a day a good fisherman would hook a far larger proportion of these rising fish. For the life of me, though, I cannot discover what one ought to do.

Trout-fishing in lakes is often very delightful. The worst that can be said of it is that it may become a monotonous kind of sport. Each cast is much like the last, and, when fish come at the fly boldly, not much art is needed to catch them. When the trout will not rise, it is duller than any other kind of fly-fishing. The chief variety is to

be got by fishing new water, and exercising one's judgment in choosing parts where trout are most likely to congregate for food. This knowledge is well worth acquiring, and, indeed, when one has to depend on oneself and not upon a boatman, it is the main science of lake-fishing. A visit to a new loch is always productive of interest, though possibly one may not bring home many fish ; and it is rare that such an excursion does not teach one something or make one ponder over the vagaries and caprices of trout.

When sport on a loch is exceptionally good, one can go on fishing day after day without wearying of the occupation. But after a succession of disappointing days, a short interval of rest is good.

Every angler who has fished in Scotland knows the feeling of renewed eagerness with which he starts on Monday. The delightful memory which I retain of the first day's fishing I ever had on Loch Cor is, perhaps, in part due to this. For two days before there had been no fishing. On Saturday it blew a gale from the west, and the rain descended in torrents from

morning to night. This would have been a small matter if there had been the slightest prospect of catching anything. But, with such a gale, the loch would have been churned to foam, and no trout would have looked at a fly in such a tempestuous downpour. On the day of rest, which followed, the wind went down, but rain fell at night. This may, perhaps, explain the peculiar feeling of delight, when one woke to find Monday clear and cloudless. The world is never so clean and smiling as when it has been washed by heavy rain. Loch Cor is near the sea. It was a long drive to get there, by stony roads, mostly across rough pastures, dotted with blackfaced Highland sheep. In places the road ran over long wet stretches of bog, where the patches of white cotton-grass grew out of the pools of brown and stagnant peat-water. When the road rose on to the higher ground again, there were distant views of a blue sea, with the white and foaming breakers from Saturday's gale still rolling on to the coast. The sun shone warmly ; the sky was blue ; the few clouds were white and fleecy ; and the air was purged of all impurities. Distant

things looked near. Near things looked fresh and sparkling. The far-off mountains of Mull and Jura rose like a grey and blue haze in the distance. The nearer hills never looked so brilliant in colour.

It was noon before I got to the place where the road ended, and a narrow sheep track led across the peat-bog to the loch. I have said that Loch Cor is near the coast. Some high and rocky cliffs rise out of the sea. Along the top of the cliffs is a fine expanse of turf, which, gradually, on the inland side, slopes down until it meets the bogs and moors which cover the country. In the depression thus formed, with the flat peat-bog on one side, and the ground rising to the summit of the cliffs half a mile off on the other, lies the loch. In size it is about a mile, or rather more, round. In one part the bottom is rocky and very deep ; in another, boggy and very shallow. Two arms, or bays, extend at opposite ends. The one is thickly grown with green reeds and tall rushes. A broad belt of water-lilies fringes this lacustrine vegetation, and beyond it is open water. In the middle is a small island with an ancient, dilapidated

ruin. The hand of man has not otherwise interfered with Loch Cor. As soon as we arrived I hastened to take my rod from its case and fix the joints together. Before the grey-bearded old native that I had brought to row the boat had finished baling her out with a small and rusty tin, I was ready to start. There are days, as I suppose other anglers will admit, when one feels a more than usually infantine impatience to begin fishing. Such a one was this, and I began to cast in a futile manner from the bank. At last we pushed off, and the old man punted us with an oar through the belt of bulrushes. I dropped my flies into every open space between the reeds and lily-leaves during our slow progress into the open water. It relieved my impatience.

The first hour of fishing was profoundly disappointing, and I caught absolutely nothing. There was a good breeze from the west, which rippled the clear, brown water and bent the reeds. The sun, on the other hand, which had seemed so cheerful in the morning, now appeared to shine with annoying and persistent brightness. Of the many little clouds, none happened ever to obscure

its face. I watched their course from one horizon to the other, and hoped for the sun to be hidden. I fished first, as being the most likely spot, the length of water right across the loch, which was fringed by the weeds. I rose four very small fish. I tried each one again, but, unlike most little fish, they showed no inclination to come at the fly a second time. One little trout was hooked for a moment, but freed himself by a lively jump out of water. I next fished over the other bay, where there was a stony bottom and a uniform depth of about three feet of pleasantly-coloured water. Here I did not get a rise. The old man had seen fish rise at every cast here in May and June. Now he was despondent. He shook his head, and then wagged his finger at the sun ; he thought the day too bright and the season too late for Loch Cor. So we rowed ashore for luncheon, and I lay down among the heather to eat some luncheon and then to smoke. The exhilaration and excitement of the morning had come to a natural end.

When the afternoon was a little advanced, a change came over the day. As often happens, a

bright and sparkling sun in the early morning means a wet evening. A thick bank of inky clouds was now rising from the west, and it was evident that in a short space of time a downpour would be upon us. It was important not to lose the interval, and the sun was now clouded over. We pushed out hastily through the reeds, in order to try the water, which looked promising, between the island and the further shore. Before I had thrown my line a dozen times two fish came at the flies together and hooked themselves. I pulled them in, and both were coaxed into the landing-net. They were of the same size and very small. A little further on, where the loch deepened off the island, I had hold of another fish, which appeared to be of respectable dimensions. It is a sweet sensation to hook a good fish after prolonged failure. This one swam deep, and even, to my astonishment, ran some line off the reel. For some time he could not be persuaded to approach the boat. And, when I brought him exhausted but still struggling to the surface, he came up with a mass of weeds round the line. His shapely form and big size were a pleasing

contrast to the two little fish on the seat beside him. I disentangled the cast, which he had managed to knot up in the most annoying way, and after five minutes more fishing another trout of the same size as the one I had just landed was hooked. This one silently took the tail fly under water, and I did not discover his presence until the line tightened. I reeled in at once, and from the docility with which he came, I estimated his size at a quarter of the last fish's. Yet when they were weighed there was not an ounce difference between them. The reason for this deceptive appearance I did not discover until I had my fish between my hands and opened his mouth. It then appeared, when I tried to loosen the fly, that the poor brute had been hooked in the tongue.

The heavens were now entirely covered with blacks clouds, and the hush which precedes a storm of rain had come. The ripples had died away and the grey, shaking reeds round the edge of the loch were reflected on its brown surface. I was much concerned to get a third fish of the same size while there was yet a chance. In this I was favoured, for, as we were drifting almost on

to the rushes, a trout rose to one of the droppers, a bright, big Red-Spinner, which showed up doubtless in the still water against the dark sky. He came with a noisy splash, and when I struck I felt he was a fitting companion to the two others on the seat of the boat. I cried to the old man to keep us away from the reeds, on to which we were floating ; the trout, in the meantime, had taken the line under the boat before I could pass my rod round the stern. There was a breathless moment or two before the oars acted and drew us out into the loch. I murmured a few words of thankfulness when the line was seen stretched by the fighting fish. This third trout was safely landed when the first drops of rain began to fall. The next minute we were pulling hard to the landing-place, where a V-shaped cut in the peaty bank had been made for the reception of the boat. The first drops of rain soon became a veritable downpour. The reeds bent before the fresh arisen wind and the waters of the loch were splashed up and pitted by myriads of great drops.

The three trout weighed over a pound apiece, which made the day memorable. In the ordinary

Scotch lochs the majority of trout that are caught run very small. Even when one is told of an average of four to the pound, it will be found that the basket, on being weighed, is nearer five or six or even eight to the pound. A loch where the trout really average half a pound is a good one. An opportunity of fishing a loch where trout of over a pound are numerous and rise freely should never be neglected. Such sport is not to be had often.

Scotland is, of course, the country in which to enjoy loch-fishing, and next comes Ireland. There can be few parts of the United Kingdom where there are so many trout-holding lakes as in County Donegal. Leave to fish may easily be got from the landowners or the innkeepers; and I verily believe that an angler might start on a tour and fish a new lake every day from the beginning of April to the end of September. In the course of his journey he would find himself upon the banks of Lough Unna, which lies under the shelter of Slieve League, where the most western part of Donegal projects into the sea. The lough is close to the road, in the midst of

bog and moorland, where the bog-myrtle is sweet-scented and the heather purple and the rushes luxuriant. It was at the end of August that I was fishing there, and the day was a fine one. The rain was suspended for a whole twenty-four hours, yet a few clouds were always passing. Fine weather in Donegal can be very brilliant, as the rare fine days in Ireland usually are. A blue sky, a sun which cast strong shadows, a brisk westerly wind, were combined to make the rippling waves on the lough sparkle ; and though the water was really peaty and black, its surface in the distance looked almost blue and shining. The lough may have been about two miles round, the edges for the most part grassy and rocky, though where a stream flowed in, there was a piece of mossy-green treacherous bog. The heavy rain of preceding days had filled the lough to overflowing, and the water had risen on to the flat grass above the usual margin. The stream flowed out in a surging yellow torrent, and tufts of rushes that appeared through the water showed the extent of the flood. I had put waders into my creel, which was lucky, for, though it did not prove needful

to wade far out, the high water over the margin had covered many places where, in the normal course, one could have stood dry-shod. For them that like bogs, mountains, and wild desolation, with a certain poverty and sadness about it, Donegal has a rare charm. Parts are too poor to produce anything from the soil except peats. Indeed, I do not think that there was any of man's handiwork visible where I stood, except the line of telegraph wire by the road and the brown pyramids of peats that dotted the hillside and stood out upon the skyline. It was, in fact, a wild enough scene to please any one ; and the only living thing was a venerable cormorant who stood perched on a rock near the edge of the lough, displaying his outstretched wings to the comfortable, drying rays of the morning sun. I have noted the day as being memorable for an ornithologist, since I had the pleasure of beholding four species of our *Corvidæ* that are not commonly to be seen in the course of one and the same day : ravens, rooks, jackdaws, and choughs.

Having put on a cast of moderately small loch-flies, four in number, such as are sold for Loch

Leven, I set to work fishing, full of hope and happiness. In about a minute I had hold of a trout, who came with such a dash and tug that it made one start, though he proved no heavier than a quarter of a pound. A few minutes more produced another, who jumped and fought so desperately that I believed the day's sport was going to be remarkable. But this proved not to be the case, and when I had a couple more small trout it was noon. The fish then almost completely stopped rising, and ignored my flies, though I toiled all round the edge, fishing assiduously.

About three o'clock the trout changed their humour, and began to rise again, not wildly, but enough to keep the sport exciting. I caught a dozen more, of which not one was over a quarter of a pound, though the strength and liveliness with which they fought for liberty was most astonishing. Many rises were short. But the number of trout that were moved by the flies as one cast yard by yard round the margin of the lough gave one a notion of the thousands of little trout it must contain. Lough Unna is fished almost daily from a boat and from the shore by

tourist-fishermen, who stay at an inn three miles down the road. Yet few return with empty baskets, and many, I was told, and can well believe it, kill three dozen and four dozen upon a good day. Such is the number of trout these loughs contain that the havoc of the anglers and the cormorants is imperceptible, and fresh trout are yearly bred ready and voracious to struggle for existence with the survivors.

Lough Unna is, I think, typical of the small Donegal lakes, and some of the pleasure of fishing in such places comes from the wildness of the country. The small trout, too, are wild, and give one sport. Nor need one have scruples of taking heavy toll and filling a basket with these Irish trout. Lake-fishing at its best is mild sport ; but when the trout do not rise, as often happens during a part of the day, one need not go fishing. One can sit upon a rock and look down at the little brown foaming waves breaking on the edge or up at the steep sides of Slieve League. The clouds come and go, capping the top or casting passing shadows on the soft greens and browns which cover the slopes. Then suddenly a trout

rises within easy reach of the edge where you are sitting, and you seize your rod and get out enough line to cast into the ring as though everything depended on catching this fish. There are half a dozen loughs within a circuit of a few miles of Lough Unna, and each contains trout of the same quality. Some are more inaccessible from the road ; some are more boggy round the edges ; some are more weedy and troublesome to fish. But the trout are abundant, and a fisherman who does not go with too highly-pitched anticipations might spend a happy day at each.

XII

Change of scene is pleasant in loch-fishing, but there are many little mountain lochs in Scotland which are so attractive that one visits them over and over again with pleasure. They are always reputed to be full of trout. I am not sure how often I have spent the day at Loch Drollsay, but I know that I have never come back with more than three trout, and often with an empty basket.

Loch Drollsay is rarely visited by anglers. There are many reasons why the loch is so seldom fished. It lies, in the first place, remote from the centres of civilization. Its shallow brown waters fill a small hollow spot in the hills a long way off the high road, and far even from the nearest sheep-farm. The trout are very diminutive and they do not rise at all freely to the fly. These reasons are enough ; yet such is the charm of this little wild loch, and of many others of the same nature, that no one who has been there upon a fine day can help feeling a desire

to return. Fishing may be an excuse, and upon each visit you start full of fresh hopes. There must be days when the trout are rising, yet somehow it is your misfortune year after year to take down your rod and tie up the joints in their case with the same sigh of disillusioned hope. At last you come to the conclusion that it is too late in the year. Then by some good chance you have an opportunity of fishing there in May or June. With what great cheerfulness do you not start on a spring morning in the Highlands ? Once more Loch Drollsay proves a disgusting disappointment. But by the following year the disgust is worn off and the disappointment forgotten. Again you start for Loch Drollsay, with your angler's blood tingling at the prospect. On the best days that ever fall to your luck you may bring back three or four little trout weighing together half a pound. It is not enough for a hungry man's breakfast. Often you get only one solitary fish. Oftener still you catch nothing, fishing all day, and wading in without waders to cover as much water as you can. One frequently reads in angling books of Scotch mountain lochs where small brown trout

are so greedy for the fly that you catch one at every cast, and sometimes have on two or three together. No doubt such lochs do exist. You think, when you discover Loch Drollsay, that it will be such a place as you have read of. You find out that it is not ; but, somehow, this does not prevent you from returning another year and devoting another day to fishing it. It becomes an annual festival.

A small burn, which descends from the moors, will lead you to the loch, for it flows out of the shallow end. You can strike the burn at a farm, on the limits of cultivation, where small patches of unripe oats are surrounded by rusty wire fencing. It is a rough walk following the course of the burn, which sometimes flows in so deep a channel that the gurgle of its water can only be heard in the heather. There is no track, and you make for some point on the skyline, crossing bits of short heather which are sound to walk upon, then floundering suddenly into soft places where the green moss and the waving spikes of cotton-grass ought to be a warning. After some distance of this tramping, you look back, and perceive that the last

human habitation has been left out of sight and that nothing but wildness meets the eye on every side. The loch must surely be over the next bit of heathery hill. But the next hill only discloses more rising ground on the skyline, and so on in succession, though you cannot help thinking that by pushing on for a few moments longer to the next heathery eminence the loch will be discovered. At length you come upon it close at hand, and stop gladly, if it is a fine and sunny day, as it should be, to pull off your cap and mop the beads off your forehead. The scent of the heather is sweet and the bog-myrtle pungent and aromatic. There is perfect silence save for the hum of flies, and perhaps the feeble twitter of a titlark put out of the heather. In past years there was always a pair of whinchats about a little patch of bracken ; and suddenly their sharp notes of alarm remind you of their presence. Can it be the same pair as last year, and do they recognize you ? They have not seen many intruders since their arrival in April, for none but shepherds and peat-cutters ever cross these parts of the hills. This alarm note they will keep up without intermission for as long as you

trespass upon their haunts. Overhead is a clear dome of blue. It is broken by a few clean, fleecy clouds, driven before the fresh northerly wind that means fine weather. On either side, rise hills of respectable but not of commanding height. They look smooth and velvety, passing through all the possible shades of brown and patched with green and purple. The shadows of clouds move swiftly over ; the warm sunshine comes and goes ; and the grasses wave in the breeze. You stand, cap in hand, taking in the scene around, and almost ready to cry out in delight and admiration. And so you turn to the fishing, and put up your rod. You pick out a fine cast and tie on three flies, or perhaps you have made up your cast the night before when the prospect of fishing Loch Drollsay again filled your mind. Much of the pleasures of fishing lie in the anticipations you form and the plans you lay of attacking in some new manner the trout which you have failed to catch. This time you have some new flies brought from London. They are fancy patterns which the trout cannot yet have seen. Certainly the little trout in Loch Drollsay have never beheld the like.

It may be that their curiosity will be excited, if not their hunger. You walk round, rod in hand, so as to get the wind behind, and then wade in a few feet at the shallow edge in order to be able to fish over the part where the water deepens. You know so well the vegetation which grows round the stony edges of the little lochs in the hills. There are the big stones which are covered when the loch rises. A little further back come the tufted rushes in stiff bunches. The boggy bits, with greyish sphagnum-moss, and red, sticky-leaved sundew, and green, greasy-leaved butterwort, lie next ; after which you get to the firm ground where the heather grows. It may happen that within the first half-dozen casts you hook a trout and form hopeful notions. This may be a day when they are rising. But it proves otherwise ; and you fish on eagerly and studiously all round the one side of the loch in vain. Once more Loch Drollsay has been a disappointment. Yet the breeze is propitious, there are dull, cloudy moments when you expect them to come at your flies, and you change patterns to feel at least that the trout have had a fair trial. The truth is, the trout in Loch Drollsay

do not rise when you want them. Whether they do so when no one is there, it is hard to say. Very possibly they never rise freely; yet you never come over the edge and catch the first view of the loch without expecting to see the surface dimpled by the noses of rising trout ready to seize any artificial fly that you care to throw them.

Having proved to your satisfaction that the day is hopeless and fishing of no possible use, you spend an hour or two in idleness before trying the trout again. It may be that the weather will change or the light alter, or something happen to bring them on the rise. So having eaten the food that you brought with you and washed it down with a drink of water from the loch, it is not a bad plan to climb to the top of the nearest hill and sit there smoking and looking at the view. Heathery hills and peat-bogs stretch themselves on every side, and in the hollows are little shining lochs hitherto undiscovered and unsuspected. At your feet lies Loch Drollsay, a few hundred yards long, but looking very small from above. It is of a heart shape, and its waters sparkle in the sunshine like some blue precious stone in a brown setting

of peat. To the north-west is the line of coast, and where it dips, the Atlantic can be seen, blue, with white rollers foaming on the rocks. An hour, or two hours, are gone soon enough looking at the view in solitude ; and you make your way down again to the edge of the loch, to fish for a little while longer. Even if you do not catch trout, the day will not have been a wasted one, though it is disappointing to be unsuccessful.

Sometimes when you have been fishing all day alone at a place like Loch Drollsay, the solitude becomes awful and the silence of the hills oppressive. Then perhaps you look up suddenly from your fishing, and feel convinced that you are being watched by some concealed eyes on the hillside above. Yet you can see no one. Or else ravens fly over, uttering diabolical sounds and almost human croaks, which startle you horribly. At last you can stand it no longer ; you pack up hastily and start running down the glen where the burn flows out, feeling that each yard brings you nearer home and safety. You have had enough of fishing the loch in solitude. But there are other days, in London and in summer, when the asphalt gets

soft, or the smell of the wood-pavement is more filthy than usual. Some people say that the air is getting used up. Lawyers count the days to the beginning of the Long Vacation and hope that they will be able to slip away, with good consciences, on Friday, though several of the more industrious of the Judges have announced that they intend to sit on Monday. Then your thoughts turn to places like Loch Drollsay, and you are seized with an almost incredible longing to be back there fishing ; and you wonder whether perchance this may be a day when the trout are rising well.

XIII

I HAVE dwelt more than once in what I have written on the extraordinary variety which trout-fishing presents. Trout in various parts of our islands differ, in a remarkable manner, not only in form and colouring, but also in habits. Yet the best modern authorities incline to call all these different forms merely varieties of one species : *Salmo fario*. Fishermen, on the other hand, tend to dwell on the differences and idiosyncrasies of the individual fish which they come across. All the varieties of trout have in common the habit of sometimes feeding with voracity, and at others refusing food for uncertain periods. This habit is naturally one which attracts the attention of fishermen, for it affects their catch in the most obvious fashion. It is due to wholly unknown causes. Some fishermen cheerfully attribute it to the weather ; others to their not having the proper bait or fly to offer. In the first case, there is clearly nothing to be done,

since we cannot control atmospheric conditions. In the second case, it would be possible to guard against failure by providing oneself with patterns that copy every creature on which trout ever feed. Some anglers try their best to do so, and I have already shown why I think they are seldom repaid for so doing. Fishermen rarely like to confess that their failure is due to incompetence or want of skill, and when one has to make that confession it is most disheartening. Few things are more consoling to the angler's vanity than to discover, on returning from an unsuccessful day, that other fishermen, more experienced and more skilful than himself, have done as badly.

Often, when trout are apparently refusing food, they are in fact feeding below the surface. On these occasions the observant fisherman, especially on South Country trout-streams with clear water and abundant weeds to hold the food, will keep his eyes open for any movement among the trout. There are few satisfactions greater than getting hold of some big tailing fish who is poking shrimps out of the weeds. With a sunk Wickham, I have several times done this with success ; the

secret is to wet the fly thoroughly before casting, and to choose a moment when the trout's head is not buried in the weeds. A small Wickham rather loosely dressed and well soaked is an excellent imitation of the fresh-water shrimp : *Gammarus pulex*. Unfortunately for the purists, that animal, which in some places forms the staple food of trout, is a crustacean and not an insect, and never floats on the surface of the water. If it is cast over a definite feeding fish, I must confess that I can see no harm in using it on the strictest dry-fly water.

All knowledge of natural history which the fisherman acquires from books or from his own observations, may serve a useful purpose. A smattering of entomology might help one to select a suitable fly on unknown streams, but with standard patterns dressed by good makers, there is seldom any real difficulty in making up one's mind or getting local advice. As often as not the standard patterns will prove as good as the local fancies. Far more useful is knowledge of the natural history of trout. All that can be learnt about the tastes, ways, and habits of fish is useful. I well

remember as a small boy that I thought it necessary to talk in a whisper when fishing. I now know that one can speak or shout as loudly as one pleases without being heard. I used to think that a gaily painted float was attractive to the fish. I now know better, for there is evidence that fish are not acutely affected by colours.

The sense organs of fishes have been very imperfectly studied by zoologists. Yet all that is known about them is of interest both to naturalists and to fishermen. It is not unusual for anglers to discuss whether trout can hear or whether they possess the sense of smell. Probably neither of the disputants is qualified to offer an opinion of much value ; for many fishermen, who have caught thousands of trout, are unable to answer, when they are suddenly asked, whether fishes have ears or how many nostrils a trout possesses. But apart from ignorance as to the structure of fishes' sense organs, it is difficult to form a judgment as to their powers. The organs, such as they are, are adapted to life in the water, and we are only able to compare their functions with the use that land animals make of apparently similar organs.

It is hard enough to form correct opinions as to the mental powers of monkeys and other even higher vertebrates; far more difficult is it to compare our own senses and actions with those of animals, like fishes, who live in a different world and are surrounded by a different element. For this reason incautious conclusions must be avoided.

The brain in all fishes is relatively small and most fishermen probably over-rate the mental powers of fishes. It does not follow that a fish is easy to catch because its intelligence is small. Besides being diminutive in size, the brain is simple and primitive in structure. Yet the senses and movements of an animal are dependent on the central nervous system of which the brain is the principal part. From the central nervous system the nerves radiate to the various sense organs. In fishes the parts of the brain and the general position of the nerves correspond with those of the higher vertebrates. Any one who will cut off the top of the skull of a large trout, which is not at all easy to do neatly and successfully, can see for himself what the brain is like. The cavity in the skull is small but the brain does

not half fill it: the remainder is more or less filled with greasy, fluid matter. When this has been washed away and removed, the four chief parts of the brain can be seen lying one behind the other. In front are the *olfactory lobes* from which the nerves of smell issue. Immediately behind are two nerve masses which form the *cerebrum*. This is the thinking part of the brain, which in man is so developed as to cover all the rest. In fishes it is very small and insignificant. In what are called Teleostean fishes (a group to which the trout and all the best-known bony fish belong) the cerebral cortex is absent. This outer part of the cerebrum is the seat of the highest mental power and is most extensive where the cerebrum is most convoluted. The brain of a fish is never corrugated and wrinkled like that of a higher mammal. Thirdly, behind the cerebrum are the most conspicuous parts of a fish's brain. These are the *optic lobes* into which run the nerves from the eyes. The last small grey mass that lies behind is the *cerebellum*, which controls the powers of movement. Then begins the spinal cord which is threaded, as it were, through the vertebræ.

There is some reason for thinking that the activities of fishes are nearly all what is called reflex. A message is sent inwards to the brain and the muscles at once contract. Sensations are changed into movement and actions take place without thinking. Opposed to reflex, are conscious actions. Reflex actions are, therefore, immediately suggested and directed by the influence of external things. Fear and anger are the chief emotions of fishes, and the search for food and for a mate chiefly occupy their activities. With so simple a brain it cannot be supposed that the whole range of their senses can be very extensive.

The eyes are probably the most important sense organs of a trout, and it has been shown by very interesting experiments that the majority of fishes seek their food chiefly if not entirely by sight.* But a certain number, such as the eel family, appear to hunt for it and recognize it by the sense of smell alone, while a few species are also aided by barbels and special organs of touch. The structure of a fish's eye does not

* See Mr. Bateson's paper on the Sense Organs of Fishes, *Journal of the Marine Biological Association*, vol. i. p. 225.

differ in any essential particulars from that of a human being. The six muscles which move the ball of the eye are there, and so are the lens, the retina and the optic nerve. The pupil is surrounded by a coloured iris but it does not seem to possess much power of contraction. A trout, as every one knows, has no eyelids and sleeps therefore, according to our notions, very uncomfortably with its eyes open. In all fishes the lachrymal gland is absent and, since they live in the water, it would serve no purpose. Artists who represent a fish shedding tears, as they are fond of doing in facetious pictures, are drawing an impossible caricature. No doubt, the sight of various species of fish varies a good deal with their eyes; but taking the whole class, their vision, both in range and acuteness, is much inferior to that of the higher vertebrates. A fish out of water can probably see very little, and not much at a distance when it is in its natural element. The fact that fish are short-sighted is shown by experiments and is also borne out by the structure of the eye. The lens is an almost perfect sphere and therefore much more convex than in a land

animal. The reason for this is obvious, since a nearly spherical lens is needed to form an image from rays of light passing through the water. The lens must be adjusted so as to throw a clear image on the retina at the back of the eyeball. This is done by a layer of muscles which can move the lens nearer to or farther from the retina. At the same time the shape of the lens can be slightly altered. In fishes there is a peculiar structure which connects the lens with the back of the eye and so plays a part in accommodating the sight. These structures working together form the machinery by which the eye is adapted for viewing objects at different distances. Now in mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, the mechanism of accommodation is at rest when the eye is directed to some far-away object such as a star. It is very significant on the other hand to find that in fishes the eye at rest is normally adjusted to near vision.

Whether fish can perceive the differences between colours is a problem that raises one of the most interesting questions to fishermen. There are some who boldly assert that fish are

quite colour-blind. To this the zoologist may reply that there is nothing in the general structure of fishes' eyes or in the microscopic structure of the retina to prove that this must be so. The difficulty is that we know little about the causes of colour blindness in human beings. In man colour blindness is congenital and incurable. It is probably due to unknown conditions of the retina or the nerves or possibly both. Whether the same conditions affect fishes in the same way one does not know. On the other hand it seems extremely improbable that fishes are quite incapable of perceiving colour, because male fish are often more brightly coloured in the breeding season. According to a theory which is still generally accepted, this is to make them attractive to their mates, who must therefore be supposed to have some perception of colour. The evidence from experiments on colour sense in a variety of fishes is entirely negative: that is to say, it goes to show that fish do not discriminate much between colours. Sir Herbert Maxwell's well-known experiments with mayflies of fantastic hues and the general experience of fly-fishermen tend to

show that trout care more about shape and size, than colour, in artificial flies. There are days frequently recorded when trout show a marked avidity for some particular pattern of fly, but no evidence is produced to show that it was the colour that they were affected by. Fishermen often describe how they cast six times over a trout without getting a rise, and then changed the fly to another shade and hooked the fish. But what proof is there that a seventh cast with the old fly might not have been successful? I have never myself seen any discrimination at all shown by trout between exactly similar patterns of different shades. And, indeed, from what we know of our own powers of vision, it is inconceivable that a fish should be able to distinguish delicate shades of red, brown, green or yellow in a fly which floats overhead between the light and its eyes. It is far more probable that it is the shape which affects its brain. Mr. Bateson's experiments with pollack in a marine acquarium bear this out. He declares that these fish ignored a straight piece of wire, but that they snatched at it when it was twisted so as to resemble the shape

of a worm and that they did so with equal avidity whether the wire was coloured white, blue, or yellow. The final conclusion is that the fish have no acute colour sense.

The sense of taste does not appear to be highly developed in any fishes. Most of them bolt their food quickly and without chewing. Carp, who are vegetable feeders, have flat, broad, back-teeth with which they masticate their food with apparent gusto ; but fishes who devour their fellows, swallow them whole. Under such conditions the sense of taste must be feeble or wanting. Experiments on a conger in an aquarium showed that it eat pieces of fish smeared with anchovy extract, cheese, camphor-spirit, trimethylamine, iodoform and turpentine without exhibiting either disgust, preference or perception. Many fishes have no tongue at all, but it is conspicuous and well developed in the trout and its allies. But even in such as have tongues this organ of taste is without those delicate membranes and fine nerves which mankind and the higher animals possess. A fish's tongue is also without power of movement, and cannot therefore, except

in a metaphorical sense, be put out at a fisherman. Salivary glands are also absent in all fishes and the sight of the most appetising food cannot make their mouths water.

Closely allied with taste is the sense of smell. It is clear that fish become aware of food without touch, vision or hearing. Whether this sense should be called smell or taste in the case of an animal living and breathing in the water is difficult to decide. Smell to a fish would perhaps be equivalent to taste at a distance. We cannot argue from our own sensations. Fishes have, however, olfactory organs and it is not unreasonable to suppose that they should "smell" things as they, indeed, appear to do. The sense of smell has its seat in the olfactory pits. The organs of smell in fishes (except the small group of lung-fishes which are exceptional in other ways) differ from our own in that they are unconnected with breathing. There is no connection between the nostril and the throat. Any one can test this for themselves by thrusting a bristle or fine wire into the nostril of a dead fish. In many fishes the sense of smell appears to be

relatively acute and when trout are taken with a worm on an absolutely dark night it is probable that they are attracted to the bait by smell. In a trout, the olfactory pits, of which there are two, lie about half-way between the eyes and the snout. Each olfactory pit has two openings, making four nostrils in all. The nostrils lie close together upon a level with the top of the eye. Each pit consists of a hemispherical depression which is lined by a delicate membrane and the membrane itself is wrinkled so as to form a rosette directly beneath the nostrils. The pleats of the rosette are abundantly supplied with nerves which lead to the olfactory lobes of the brain. The two nostrils vary much in shape and construction in different families of fishes. But they are generally more or less adapted to send a current of water through the nose. In the trout, the front nostril is a narrow slit whilst the hinder one is more oval in shape. The bridge of skin between the two is raised to form an upstanding flap which catches the current of water. It is also prolonged downwards nearly to the floor of the nose-pit and so forms a delicate pliant curtain which conducts

water entering the front nostril through the pleats of the rosette. In some fishes, including the trout, the true olfactory pit which has just been described, opens into accessory sacs or chambers. These sacs, in some species, can be dilated and compressed so as to produce a gentle current of water over the rosette. The currents produced by these sacs are rhythmical, flowing in and out of the nose as the fish gently opens and shuts its mouth in breathing. In this way the fish is compensated for its loss of the power of sniffing which we enjoy when our nostrils are suddenly assailed by bad smells. The strength of the water current must be under the control of the fish ; for a sudden movement of the jaws would produce a strong current exactly comparable to a suspicious sniff in a human being. In fishes with noses of this class it is generally arranged by means of valves that the water shall enter by the front nostril and leave by the hind one. The current of water may also be made to play on the rosette by means of hair like cilia in the front nostril. This seems to be the only way in eels, which are among the few fishes which hunt their food by smell. Another

method is that found in fish, of which there are many kinds, where a hood over the front nostril deflects water into the nose cavity as the animal swims forward. The essential structure of a fish's nose and the mechanism of sniffing is so like that of higher animals that one is almost compelled to suppose that they enjoy the sense of smell. A fish is of course dependent for oxygen on the gas dissolved in the water. Some naturalists incline to think that the sense of smell, in our ordinary meaning, is absent in the vast majority of fishes, and that they use their noses for testing the water used for breathing.*

There is plenty of evidence that fishes perceive violent shocks or concussions such as those caused by firing guns or hammering on the bank. But there is no conclusive evidence that their ears are capable of appreciating those delicate vibrations which affect the senses of ourselves or other land-animals and convey sensations which we mean when we speak of hearing sounds. To

* Those who desire to know more should consult an interesting and learned paper by Mr. R. H. Burne, "The Anatomy of the Olfactory Organ in Teleostean Fishes." *Proceedings of the Zool. Soc. Lond.*, 1909, p. 610.

that extent, therefore, fish are probably deaf. A number of recent experiments tend to show that in fishes the ears are without hearing functions, and are solely organs which enable the animal to maintain its equilibrium in the water. The old stories of fish which came to be fed when called or when a bell was rung must all be regarded as mythical.

No fishes have an external ear and none of the typical bony fishes have an opening from the outside world into the cavity of the ear. In most mammals there exists a well-developed ear, supported by cartilage; and there is considerable evidence to show that this external ear is derived from the gill-cover of fishes. It is unfortunately difficult to give a clear picture of the internal structure of an animal's ear without a diagram; but those who care to visit the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons can see for themselves the most delicate and beautiful anatomical preparations that have ever been made. The highly developed ear of a mammal consists of three parts. There is first the outer ear outside the tympanum or drum. Secondly, there is a middle

part between the drum and the inner ear. Thirdly, there is the inner ear itself, which communicates with the nerve and which is the only essential and sensory part of the organ. This inner ear is the only part which occurs in fishes, who consequently possess no drum. It is believed that the internal ear of a fish is a modified part of the lateral line, a sense organ peculiar to fishes and tadpoles, of which more must be said later on. This lateral line which every one must have noticed running along the side of a fish from the head to the tail is a modification or development of the skin. There are, therefore, as it were, three generations of sense-organs, skin, lateral line, and ear, each developed from the other to meet the requirements of the fish. The internal ear of a fish consists of a vestibule or chamber out of which arise three semi-circular canals. The three canals form a delicate membranous labyrinth leading out of the vestibule and back again. But the most peculiar part of the fish's ear is the vestibule itself, which is expanded into one or more sacs each containing an otolith or ear-stone. As a rule, there are three ear-stones, of which one is

much bigger than the others. In a big fish like a cod, it is a large, firm calcareous stone, which can be easily found by any one who likes to do a little dinner-table dissection when the head of a boiled fish is served. Dr. Lee, an American naturalist, has suggested that the ear-sacs and stones have nothing to do with hearing but serve the fish in perceiving movements through space such as rotation and loss of equilibrum.* After many experiments with dogfish, in which the canals or the auditory nerves were cut, he has been able to produce strong evidence that the ear is an organ closely connected with the sense of equilibrium. If the otoliths or ear-stones are removed from one ear, the fish's balance is interfered with to a considerable extent. The removal of otoliths from both ears practically destroys all sense of equilibrium. An attempt has been made to connect the three stones with movements through the three dimensions of space but this has not been very convincing. There is, however, a general opinion now that fish which, with few exceptions,

* Dr. Lee's paper will be found in the *Journal of Physiology* for 1894, vol. xv.

are dumb, are also deaf to ordinary sounds. The connection between their internal ears and lateral lines has clearly been traced. It would seem that ears were not evolved to hear delicate vibrations of sound until animals became breathers of air.

Lastly, there remain to be described the lateral lines and other mysterious sense-organs of fishes about which not much is known. Whether they are organs of touch or taste or means of perceiving vibrations in the water is not clearly decided. That fish are sensitive to touch is obvious, even when they are covered with horny scales, but the most delicate parts are about the snout, where special organs, barbels, are developed. The lateral line which is conspicuously marked in many fish, and is sometimes differently coloured, is a tube with small openings at regular intervals which perforate the scales. One purpose of this tube is certainly to secrete slime, and it is sometimes called the mucous canal system. The lateral line continues up to the head, but is less conspicuous there. It passes under the skin and a series of connected tubes pass along the ridges of the forehead, cheeks, jaws and eyes. They

still communicate with the surface of the skin by pores and produce mucous. The canal is provided with special nerves and sensory cells. It is looked on as a sense-organ, but what purpose it serves has not been clearly established. It is, without doubt, adapted to the conditions of aquatic life, because the fish-like tadpoles of frogs and other amphibians have a lateral line which is lost in the mature animal which lives on land. Its use is very problematical, but probably, besides secreting slime, it enables the fish to perceive waves of vibration in the water. The relationship of the internal ear with the lateral line confirms this view. It may be that the power of perceiving wave vibrations which must be strongly felt in water, enable the fish to feel the approach of its prey or its enemies. That this would be of the greatest service to fish both large and small, cannot be doubted. "Master," says the fisherman in *Pericles* (Act II., sc. 1), "I marvel how fishes live in the sea." To which the older fisherman answers: "Why, as men do a-land; the great ones eat up the little ones."

Very closely allied to the sense-organs of the

lateral line are structures known as *end-buds*. They are, in fact, a number of sensory cells compacted into a mass shaped like a flower-bud and connected with the nervous system. In lampreys and fishes they are scattered over the surface of the body. In the highest land-animals they are confined to the inside of the mouth and it is such structures as these which enable us to taste. It may well be that fishes, living as they do in water, are capable of tasting with their external skin.

It seems, then, that the main thing is to keep out of sight when one is fishing, for the eyes of the trout are its chief defence against the approach of an angler on the bank. With very shy trout in shallow streams, and no growth of herbage along the bank, this is really the greatest difficulty with which the fisherman has to contend. A second difficulty, also dependent on the trout's sense of sight, is the gut-shy fish which makes off as soon as the fly falls. This terror, produced by gut floating over a trout's head, increases in marked fashion as the season goes on if the water has been at all fished. It is a problem worth

considering whether the trout's movements under these conditions are due to conscious or reflex action. It is strange, however, that where trout are very constantly fished for they become more regardless of the gut and go on feeding steadily. They seem to trust to their powers of discriminating between natural and artificial flies. One day it probably comes to pass that they make a mistake.

XIV

Sea-trout fishing comes, as it were, midway between trout and salmon-fishing. The sea-trout more nearly approaches a salmon than a brown-trout in nature and habits. The gap between a sea-trout and a lazy cautious chalkstream fish is very wide. From the fishing stand-point, sea-trout have great qualities, for they rise much more freely than salmon, and are less timid than brown-trout. When hooked, they jump and fight for freedom like fury. It has seldom been my good fortune to fish lochs into which sea-trout could run up, but the sport one may get is unsurpassed among all the forms of loch-fishing. Good fishing for sea-trout may also be had in salt water. I chanced once to fish a brackish bit of tidal water for sea-trout, and caught on the same fly, in the same pool, a small sea-trout, a small brown-trout, and a small lythe or pollack.

The greatest enjoyment that I have had with

sea-trout has been in Islay. The sea-pools of the Sorn have such a peculiar charm that I have often been at some pains to discover the reason of it. After it has run into the shallow sea-loch on the south-western coast of the island, the fresh water finds its way into the salt ocean. The little river emerges from a wind-swept wood of stunted ash and sycamore, and flows, winding slightly for the last part of its short course, over the grassy flats at the end of the loch. At its broadest part the river is nowhere wider than a roadway. At the end it runs in a channel excavated through a gravelly alluvial soil. The course just above this, in the wood, is rocky, with tumbling waterfalls and deep brown pools. A rough and ancient fence of posts and rails marks the boundary of the wood, and here is the first of the sea-pools. The salt tide comes up to this twice a day. At spring-tides the sea holds back the fresh water which fills up the channel, more or less to the brim, and sometimes overflow on to the grass. The first sea-pool has a very distinctive character. At the fence there is a rocky cataract, over which the water pours with some agitation, into a deep,

circular hole. The sycamores and the ash-trees partly overhang the sides where the water is smooth. In the middle of the pool flows a strong, bubbling current, which dies away at the tail-end. It is a pretty thing to watch a fly, thrown across the pool, work round into the current, as the line is first curved and then straightened out by the stream. It is a great satisfaction when the water is properly coloured, to throw a conspicuous silver-bodied fly, as you stand at the fence, and see a fine silvery sea-trout come up and take it with a dash, as you work it against the stream. The remainder of the sea-pools are hollowed out in the channel at places where the course bends. They are longer, more even-flowing; and overhanging banks mark the spots where they have been cut out of the grass. At the head of the loch, on either side of the river, are the flats. They are covered with rich, salted grass, intersected with little crooked channels, into which the tide rises, and dotted over with stagnant, rushy pools. It is here that the herons watch silently for eels, and the redshanks search noisily for worms and shrimps. In the spring months these flats are a

blaze of yellow from the gorse bushes ; the grass is dotted with pink thrift, and the damp water-courses are gay with blue forget-me-nots. At all seasons the place is strewn with dry, shrivelled sea-weed, blown in before the wind, and bits of wooden wreckage, soaked and bleached by the salt water and the sun.

Such are the sea-pools, as it were half-way between sea and river. The little river, from a fishing aspect, suffers from a common defect. There is rarely enough water ; and when, after rain, it has risen to the required height, only a day elapses and it is again too low. But there is water in the sea-pools when the upper stretches are mere trickles among the stones. And, be there any wind at all, it is rare not to find a little ripple on the surface. For this reason, and also because they are very near the house, the sea-pools are much resorted to ; and I have many recollections of different days spread over several years. Salmon pass up in numbers in the autumn, but do not, I think, come into the sea-pools unless there is enough water to take them higher. They wait out at the mouth of the estuary, leaping and

playing in the sea until there is a spate ; then it is a sight to see them jumping in line at the falls, and dashing through the shallower water above, like mad things, until they can find security in the next pool. I have never caught a salmon in the sea-pools. Sometimes large burn-trout get washed down, and seem to thrive in the brackish water and take a sea-trout fly. It is, however, the sea-trout which keep one attracted by the sea-pools day after day, whatever the weather and however low the water. I remember once fishing the top pool ten evenings in succession without getting a rise. I had become firmly convinced that there were no fish there. Next day we ran a net through and hauled out fourteen sea-trout. Of course they may all have come in with the previous tide. In any case, at the sea-pools, one never should abandon hope. The sea-trout are probably there awaiting a rise in the river. A real spate is an astonishing sight to see. All the well-known landmarks, such as rocks and shoals, are lost. The stream tears, thick and foaming, into the sea. Branches and beams of timber are swept along, and the turbid water sometimes rises above

the banks into the wood. Then one waits. The water subsides next day, and all the thrushes and blackbirds come down to the edge which was flooded to feast on worms. The fish, too, are glutted with this diet, though, before the water has cleared enough for a fly, one may get a few sea-trout with a stiff rod and a lobworm threaded on a hook. But, somehow, this is not very satisfactory sport, and one waits impatiently for the water to fine down. The next day is one to be made the most of. The water is no longer muddy, but flows still and deep, coloured with peat to the shade of weak black coffee. A silver-bodied, bright-hued fly on a fairly big hook is best to begin with, and sea-trout are not particular as to the pattern. There is no need to crawl and to stalk them on a day like this. You cast across to the opposite bank, and work the fly with short jerks as it comes over to you with the current. There is something that is really splendid in the daring rise of the sea-trout at your fly. With a trout-rod, they run out the line, and give you great excitement and anxiety, dashing about the pool and leaping out of the water in their eagerness to

be free. This sport may last a day or two at the most unless there is more rain to keep up the river; but on the second day you will find it probably harder to catch them. The water is nearly down to its old level. The well-known stones, which one watches at the bridge, have reappeared, and the water is as clear as peat water ever is. One changes, of course, to a smaller fly, sometimes even before the first day is over. A claret-coloured wool body replaces the silver tinsel, and sober grouse feathers supersede the gaudy wings. The stock of sea-trout is big in a good year, and, as far as the sea-pools are concerned, I believe that sometimes each tide may bring up fresh fish to wait until there is water to go higher. Sometimes one sees the fish jumping and splashing in shoals as they come up the channel with the tide. When the river is low most of these drop back to the sea with the ebb-tide. But a few seem to remain behind. Now, as long as there are sea-trout in a pool, and one can keep out of sight, it is, to my mind, worth fishing. You may not catch much; but if you will take the trouble to use a fine trout-cast and a small

loch-fly and exercise a little skill in throwing a light line, and are not above stooping and kneeling, you will probably catch something. I do not pretend that you will do so in the full glare of the sun. But in the evening there is generally an hour when it is worth trying, in spite of being told that it is a hopeless fishing day, that the water is too low and clear, the sky too bright, the air too still or thundery, and the hundred other reasons which are constantly urged to dissuade one from trying to catch fish under difficulties.

I well remember the brilliant August evening some years ago when I discovered that one could catch these sea-trout when the river was low, and the keeper said it was no use fishing. I was inclined to think that he must know best, but yet could not rest satisfied until I had tried. The day had been hot, and there had been no rain for weeks. The sun was just about to set behind the western range of heathery hills, and the rays caught one over the nape of the neck as one walked across the flats to the mouth of the river. The tide was out, and a vast stretch of wet sand had attracted the shore-birds to feed. Curlews

were stalking about, probing the mud with their beaks. A flock of redshanks rose from the sea near the edge of the bottom pool, and wheeled about as they made off with fluty cries of warning. Down on the shore, where the rippling sea and the wet sands met, a great assemblage of gulls had come together in a noisy concourse. My heart was full of misgiving when I saw the lowness of the river, the unsuspected shoals of sand that were laid bare in the river-bed, and the stones at the bottom of the pools which I had thought were deep. I began fishing with a sea-trout fly, which fell with a perceptible splash on the pool. The surface shone like brown, burnished metal in the setting sun. It was obviously hopeless, and I soon sat down disheartened, and almost devoured by the midges. Then it occurred to me to venture upon an experiment and see what could be done by a change from the usual mode of sea-trout fishing. The rocky pool at the fence was still of very respectable depth, and had not been disturbed by my presence. I put on a tapered, three yard long, dry-fly cast of the finest gut I had, and a small, hairy Red Palmer for a fly.

A wide circuit brought me above the pool, and I kept far back, kneeling upon the grass, so that the sea-trout could have no suspicion of my arrival. The wood was now casting a welcome shade upon the water, and if there were sea-trout, as I knew there must be, I felt convinced that I should get a rise. My notion is that a sea-trout is a beast of prey and that one should aim at tempting him to rush predaciously upon some small marine animal which is seeking to escape. I therefore let the stream carry out my line, and kept the fly working and struggling against the current. I had hardly searched the whole pool over in this manner when there was a dash, and a silvery form came up, turned over, and went off with the hook well into him. It was a moment of rare satisfaction. I played him carefully so as not to disturb the water and alarm the others. When I had got him netted and killed I repeated the manœuvre with success, and secured a couple. Since then the charms of the sea-pools have become inexhaustible, though I shudder to think how many times I have fished them over and got nothing. Yet the chance of getting a fish is good enough to

keep one's hope lively. I am more than ever convinced of the soundness of my belief that, as long as there are sea-trout up, and one will take the pains to keep out of their sight, they are always worth fishing for. The same thing cannot be said of salmon.

It was my good fortune, not long since, to have three days' fishing on one of the best sea-trout lochs in Scotland. I had almost described it as the best in Scotland, but in such things comparison must be impossible. The uncertainty of loch-fishing is so great that manifestly the best lochs will have ups and downs in the sport they yield. During the three weeks before I arrived hardly anything had been caught. Loch Areanus has a very high reputation. Many distinguished anglers have fished it, and one at least has written about the sport he enjoyed. Mr. Herbert Spencer often fished there, and his name and the number of fish he killed are recorded in the fishing-book. There is a legend that the philosopher experimented on the trout with a fly dressed by himself from his own hair. The records of the fishing-book go back to the 'sixties of last century, and they have been kept with much greater

care than those of any other sea-trout loch that I know of. Having no memory for figures and statistics, I will not attempt to give any exact idea of the number and weight of the fish that have been caught. The loch has never been heavily fished or, except at certain seasons, fished with any real regularity. None but the owner and his guests enjoy the right, and for this reason there must be many days in the season when huge catches might be made and there is no one fishing. The present owner told me that his best day was seventy sea-trout between the two rods in the boat. None of these were very large fish. Another angler described how, some years ago, towards the end of July he and another had fished the loch regularly for a fortnight. The bag exceeded twenty fish every day, and a large number were two-pounders and over. After these figures I have done with my statistics, and will come to a description of the loch and the manners of the sea-trout which my companion and I caught.

One of those small salmon rivers of which there are many on the West Coast connects the loch and the sea. The end of the loch is not

more than three or four miles from the coast. The river is often low and the fate of the fishing in the loch is dependent, it is believed, on the coming of a good flood when the shoals of sea-trout are waiting in the bay. If there is a spate they have a clear and easy run into the loch ; if not, it is believed, they move elsewhere along the coast. But as to this, all existing information is uncertain. The great majority run straight into the loch, no doubt. Others certainly remain some while in the pools of the river and afford most excellent sport. Indeed, I have never appreciated so keenly how much greater is the pleasure and excitement of catching a sea-trout in running water and catching the same fish, or rather his neighbour, casting from a boat over a loch. In a loch one feels somehow that one is casting over an unknown void, from which there is no more reason to expect the coming of the fish at the fly at one moment more than another. In the river, previous experience or instinctive knowledge teaches one when to expect a rise and where fish will be found at various states of water. So much of the angler's pleasure lies in the

anticipation of sport and the expectation of hooking a big fish, that when the desired rise comes at the moment we await it, our satisfaction is increased. This is, perhaps, very obvious; but it explains why chalkstream fishing, where we see the fish and can fix exactly the moment when the rise may be awaited, is so much more exciting and satisfactory than any other sort of trout-fishing. But the matter does not really rest there. A stream affects the behaviour of our fly in a fashion that the still waters of a loch do not emulate. There is a liveliness and variety about every cast that one makes for a sea-trout in a river which the best loch cannot vie with. And lastly, when the fish is hooked, the thrills of anxiety or excitement which the liveliest sea-trout can give one are reduced to the lowest point in a loch. Yet, when all is said, sea-trout fishing in any place remains very good sport.

The three days on Loch Areanus gave between them a fair average. For whilst Tuesday was odious as to weather and unsatisfactory as to results, Wednesday was a day unprecedented in the memory of man and the records of the loch.

It was not, however, the sea-trout which produced this exceptional bag, but the fact that we each killed a salmon and each hooked and lost another. It was over three years since any salmon had been caught in the loch, though great numbers must be there indifferent to the flies.

The loch is fully two or three miles long and from half a mile to as much again in breadth. On one side is deer-forest with rocky ground, high heather and a fair sprinkling of birch and alder trees with some bracken between them. On the other side is sheep-ground with poor grazing, rising sharply to mountains from which a mass of rough detritus and fallen stones have accumulated in gullies and on slopes which scar the hillsides. At the head of the loch stands a shepherd's cottage, harled, white and very solitary, the only human habitation in the view. At the bottom, where the river makes its exit, there is a very peculiar sandy and gravelly beach, which forms a bar on which parties of gulls are fond of standing, all heading against the wind and dozing or doing their toilets. Near this is *Salmon Bay*, where, according to tradition, salmon most commonly rise ; but it was not there that my fish took.

Tuesday may be shortly described and done with. It was one of the roughest and wettest days that I remember. The waves on the loch were fearful. Two men could hardly row and control the heavy boat from which we fished. My angling companion, who was the owner of the loch, used, as is the custom there, a fourteen-foot two-handed rod, and no doubt he covered more water, showed his flies for a longer time, and got more rises. But for amusement my stiff little greenheart gave the most satisfaction to myself though it delayed the netting of the fish. It wants a big sea-trout to give much excitement to the man who catches him on a fourteen-foot rod. As for flies, the same two patterns which have been tried and found effective are used by every one. A bold man must be found some day to face the keeper's displeasure and try some novelties. The flies are fancy sea-trout patterns. One is called *The Cobb*, after a Mr. Cobb who introduced it years ago with success. It is of a medium size for sea-trout and is chiefly composed of blue hackles. The second is called after its colour the *Greenery-Yallery*, and dates, I imagine,

from the days when *Patience* was produced at the Savoy. We fished, with as much assiduousness as could be expected in such weather, for about two hours, and killed eight sea-trout between us. Not one of them touched 2 lbs., and six out of the eight fell to my companion and his big rod. It was no deprivation of pleasure to give up, for we were wet to the skin and buffeted by the wind and the tossing of the boat.

Next morning was fine and we had our great day. The glass was rising. The sun shone cheerfully; and a fresh or strong breeze blew out of the north-west. I started fishing about ten o'clock, with the same two boatmen but another angling companion. The sea-trout were rising well when we began alongside the reeds at the northern end of the loch. Within a few minutes from the start I had two beautiful fish safely landed, and a moment later had two fish on together. Each weighed a pound and by a little judicious management of the net they were both secured. Then came the salmon. I was casting into the shore against some rocks. The loch was very high after prolonged rain, and much grass and

some low bushes were partly submerged. The fly was taken under water without any sign of a rise, but from the bending of the little rod I guessed, and sang out at once, that I had hold of a good one. It was not, however, until half an hour later, by which time I was trembling in the knees and sweating with anxiety, that we knew for certain that it was a salmon. He weighed 9 lbs. when we got him into the boat. The fish swam deep in steady, sulky circles round the stern of the boat. Had he known the strength of the cast and the slenderness of the rod, which bent into a half-circle, he might have played more lively tricks and broken away. But he neither ran out the line, nor after the first moments, when he discovered that he was hooked, did he allow me to reel in. As fights with salmon go, this was a dull one ; but the relief was none the less when it was over. I well remember sitting down suddenly with shaky legs and a sigh of gratitude to the boatman who got him skilfully head-foremost into the net. The fish proved to be very red and had been up a couple of months or more.

My companion did not get his salmon until late in the afternoon. We were naturally full of expectation as we drifted round *Salmon Bay*, but no sign of a salmon showed itself. A little further on, where waves were dashing against a rocky shore, a fish came at the tail-fly. My companion had a double-handed rod and the salmon was securely hooked. He played briskly on the surface and several times ran out a dangerous length of line and splashed about. But the fight was not a long-drawn-out one. This fish weighed 14½ lbs. Having broken the records of the past ten or eleven years, and got two salmon out of the loch in a day, we were encouraged to try the ground over again, for we had glimpses of other fish playing and rising in the rough water along this southern shore. My turn came next. A fish rose at me. I turned him over in the water and felt a tug, but the hold gave, and he was off. Then came my companion's turn to lose one. It was disappointing; for the fish was well on and partly played. I think the fisherman, emboldened by success and trusting to a big rod, was very severe on his fish.

He pulled him about as he pleased and the hold of the fly gave. We tried this salmon ground again and changed to small salmon-flies and stouter gut. But the moment of success was over and the fish were out of humour. It may be another three years before one of the hundreds of salmon in that loch chances to fall a victim to the fisherman's fly. Meantime we had been adding to our bag of sea-trout. The basket was divided among us to carry home: two salmon, weighing 14½ lbs. and 9 lbs. respectively, and eighteen sea-trout, weighing over 19 lbs.

On the third day, which was Thursday, September 1, the conditions were entirely changed. Yet, of course, the natural optimism of anglers made us hope that the salmon might again be rising. Needless to say, no such thing happened. We were off early. I had again a different angling companion in the boat. There was a flat calm with fine drizzling rain. The midges drove one distracted. But about noon the sun broke through, and soon after, a pleasant breeze ruffled the loch sufficiently to set the sea-trout rising. Our joint basket by four o'clock was nineteen,

weighing 15 lbs., an inferior average of size compared with the day before.

On the way homewards I stopped to try the river, which had gone down fast in the last twenty-four hours. There was a flat, steady run some hundred yards long, where the water flowed smoothly over a level. It was the very place where one would expect to find sea-trout, while the water was still on the high side. I persuaded the keeper to leave me to my own devices and go home. Then with a silver-bodied fly, a fine cast, and a single-handed rod, I fished the run carefully down. A few yards from the top came the first fish with a fine boil, but missed the fly. I walked backwards and on coming over him a second time the fly was seized in the proper fashion to be expected among sea-trout. There were rises every few yards, but the greater number came short. I had, however, caught and landed five by the time I got to the end of the stretch. The best weighed $3\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. and was a noble fish except that he was not fresh run. These five from the river gave me, somehow, more pleasure than all the others we caught in the loch put together.

XV

It is no uncommon thing to hear people say that they have not enough *patience* for fishing. As a matter of fact, it is not patience but hope that is required. Patience implies suffering, whilst hope breeds cheerfulness. A hopeful spirit, which is an essential part of every angler's nature, is more needed in fishing for salmon than for trout. There are so many blank days, the habits of the fish are so mysterious, we know so little of the causes which prompt the salmon to rise to a fly, that a large stock of hope is necessary : and there is no reason why a day which apparently promises badly should not turn out well. We are, as it were, fishing in darkness ; but sooner or later, if we persist, we shall be rewarded by the supreme satisfaction of hooking a salmon. When the salmon takes hold, it is, as a rule, a moment of perfectly supreme satisfaction. But sometimes even that actual moment is disappointing ; and any one who expects

that a 20-lb. salmon will give ten times the sport of a 2-lb. trout, has but to kill one salmon to discover that he is mistaken. I was once fishing on the Tay with a youthful angler. After many hours of dreary and fruitless casting, the youth called out for assistance because, as he said, something very odd had happened to his line. The mystery was soon solved ; a salmon had taken the fly under water, and was fighting sulkily at the bottom of the pool. In order to persist until success is attained, hope, artificially cultivated, is essential ; and to keep it alive, the salmon-fisher resorts to many devices.

It is, of course, different with trout-fishing, especially where we see the fish, or watch their rings, when they rise. We know that at some time or other they will be likely to come on the feed. We can usually tell what fly they will take. Experience gained on one trout stream seldoms fails on other trout streams of the same nature. For though no man can compel trout to take a fly when they will not, the skill of the individual fisherman always counts for much more with trout than it does with salmon. It is undoubtedly one of the

attractions of salmon-fishing that there is something of a lottery about it, and that the prizes, though few, are big ones. Who is there that has not, on a fishing-day, abandoned the fair chance of a good basket of trout for the faint chance of a small salmon? Again, the attractions of salmon-fishing are vastly increased for some people by the nature of the water to be fished and the pleasure of wielding a big rod and casting a heavy line. There is a passage in one of George Borrow's books in which he describes how he has always loved to gaze upon streams. A fisherman can rarely cross a bridge without lingering for a few moments to look at the water. Running water is a thing that fascinates and holds us spellbound. In this same spirit one may say that no day spent on the banks of even the meanest salmon river is ever dull. Moreover, a man who has fished diligently all day with a salmon-rod feels that he has done hard work and earned his rest. These things enable us to face the blank days. For though a man may be tired and disheartened by the evening, the true fisherman always wakes hopeful next morning. There may even be good reasons for hoping that fortune

will change. If there are not, the fisherman invents them. I once fished for three consecutive weeks on one of the best salmon rivers in Norway and got only two fish. Neither of them was large and the smallest weighed only 6 lbs. The other was caught, almost by chance, harling. There were, if I remember rightly, twelve or thirteen blank days in succession. Yet one went on fishing daily, as a matter of course, for the water was in perfect order. The most light-hearted and persistent fisherman could not face such a succession of blank days without despondency did he not artificially cultivate hope. It would seem that one of the most effective ways of doing this is to carry a large stock of flies and to change from one to the other.

Among the principal mysteries of salmon-fishing is the nature of the instinct or impulse which makes the fish seize what is known as a fly. It may be appetite, anger, play, curiosity, annoyance, or merely a predatory instinct. It is now so well established that salmon do not habitually feed in fresh water that the fisherman cannot hope that hunger will impel the salmon in a pool, sooner or later, to take the fly. On the other hand, if curiosity

or annoyance be the moving impulse, there is every reason to go on hoping. And the unaccountable way in which a fish that has been shown the fly at intervals during the day will at last suddenly seize it, almost induces one to believe that salmon can be successfully teased into rising. It must be, of course, remembered that salmon have no hands ; and the only way they can gratify their curiosity or exhibit anger is by seizing a little moving object in their jaws. Sometimes they evidently only come up to look at the fly, and having satisfied themselves, go back. Sometimes they rise with an angry snap and miss the fly. In such cases there is hope that they may come again later on.

Hope is very much kept alive in salmon-fishing by the fact that we do not see our fish and only know of their whereabouts by tradition or experience. The foaming pool is deep, and who knows what may be happening beneath the surface as we cast across and watch the lively fly swimming and struggling, as it were, against the stream ? Have the salmon seen it ? Have they been following it under water undecided whether to take it ? May not another cast be successful ?

Then, after hours during which not a fish has been moved, we wonder whether there is a salmon in the pool. No means of knowing exists, and all this uncertainty may be made conducive to hopefulness if we look at things from the angler's aspect. It is the tremendous uncertainty of salmon-fishing that keeps us always expectant. Hope is naturally at its highest in the morning, when we reel off a little line at the edge of the first pool, and begin to fish with lively eagerness and care. We will suppose the state of the river is pronounced good: neither too high nor too low. The weather and the wind we put down also as favourable, so far as we can judge; at least we hope that they are. How often the voice of the ghillie, sitting on the bank attentive and watchful, declares, as the fly reaches some part of the pool: "He should come now, if he comes at all." The critical moment passes, we have fished with redoubled care, the fly is cast further down across the swirling stream, and nothing has happened. So we fish over the whole pool fruitlessly. But we are not in the least dispirited, because we fully hope that the next pool

will produce a rise. We are convinced that the day is not going to be blank. We could not go on fishing were it otherwise.

But then as the day passes without a rise or a pull the spirit sinks a little. The best pools have yielded nothing. We begin to fish like a machine, covering the water foot by foot, and working the fly without the same trembling expectation as at the beginning of the day. When we have fished our beat once over, we revive our courage by changing the fly. This is the most fertile expedient for raising fresh hopes, though one may doubt how far a salmon discriminates between minute shades of colour and small differences in dressing. Size is more important, for there can be no doubt that in deep and heavy water a larger fly is needed than when the river is low. So two courses are open to us: we can try with different patterns, and we can try them of different sizes. At each change of fly we gaze for a moment at the attractive combination of tinsel and feathers, we test the knot, and straighten out the gut with our fingers before launching it to take its trial. Surely it will be irresistible.

At last, when various patterns are tried in vain, we feel once more a trifle downhearted: yet the angler's spirit tells us we must not give up fishing. So we give the river a rest, which means really that we rest ourselves, and begin in half an hour with fresh hopes. Or else we eat some food or sit down to smoke, both of which are infallible remedies for despondency in fishing. Or else we persuade ourselves that some change has come over the water or the weather since we tried the same pool earlier in the day. If it was cloudy, we persuade ourselves that sun will make the fish move. If the morning was bright, we welcome clouds, because any change makes us hopeful again. It is considered a rule among salmon-fishers that there is a better chance on a dull than on a bright day. But I remember once fishing on a small river when there were abrupt changes from dark clouds to brilliant sunshine, and the two fish hooked during the day both rose to the fly when the sun was throwing its rays on the pool, though it had been fished over before during dull and cloudy intervals. So any change may give ground on which to build our hopes. We also

look to the direction and force of the wind. The stagnant pool will now have a good ripple from the breeze. In another place we shall be able to get out a better line since the wind has dropped. Or else we look at the water, which may have fallen now and have been too high earlier in the day : or else a shower on the hills has coloured it a little and we hope that now a change will come. By night-time we are, of course, often disappointed and cast down by fruitless labour. But hope always comes in the morning.

Every one who takes notice of such things will agree that anglers are optimists ; and the same may be said of every healthy man who is worth anything. But whether the fishermen are optimists because they are fishermen, or fishermen because they are optimists, is a problem of some difficulty. Perhaps there is a survival of the fittest among anglers, as among other organisms, and those who are not endowed with an optimistic mind and temper, drop out of the ranks early. Fish are so whimsical and both salmon and trout-fishing are often so full of mystery, that we are compelled not to abandon hope unless

we mean to give up fishing. Nevertheless, I had best end what I have written with John Bunyan's verses :

Yet fish there be that neither hook nor line
Nor snare nor net nor engine can make thine.

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